

THE STUDY OF INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
VOL III



अग्रतः चतुरो वेदाः पृष्ठतः सशरं धनुः।

The Epics

Ramayana
and Mahabharata

They depict the biographical sketches of ideal men in action. The Sages exhort common man to follow their lead. Righteous and truthful behaviour is the key to success and happiness. But be vigilant and keep your powder dry.

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The Epics

In this volume, we have touched upon certain peculiar notions about our History and culture, for they are still current in the elite circles of our Ancient Land. The biggest misconception amounting almost to a fraud was about our Ancient Chronology. We have tried to remove it, in our First Volume, by adducing clinching evidence in support.

There are still very many misconceptions persisting in the thinking sections of our society. Many of our Indologists still persist in accepting the Aryan immigration theory, the basic premise underlying this being the destruction of the Indus Civilization (We call it Sarasvati-Sindhu Civilization) by the invading nomads, the Aryans. We have therefore incorporated an analytical chapter on it, pointing out in the sequel that this theory is as dead as dodo.

On this background, the readers will appreciate the exploits of the heroes of these two epics as parts of our history. 'The history of ancient India as we find it in the epics is no real history', so these myth-makers proclaim to self alienated progressives! Almost all the Indians however, believe the narration in these as part of our authentic history.

The central theme of these two great Epics : Ramayana and Mahabharata is the protection of Dharma righteousness and the suppression of Adharma, the evil tendencies. Rigveda proclaims 'here there is none superior, or none inferior. All are brothers and they have all gathered together to increase the wellbeing of all.' (R.V.5-60-5) Dharma protects the weak and thus removes the inequalities between man and man created by nature. Some are endowed with more strength, more intelligence and more acumen than others. Those so endowed tend to develop domineering attitude which when they attain success results in grabbing propensities. The Dharma puts a check on these.

(Continued on third cover page)

18-5

BHISHMA'S
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GENERAL EDITOR

Itahasa Bhushana
Dr. S.D. Kulkarni

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GENERAL EDITOR

Itihasa Bhushana

Dr. Shripad Dattatraya Kulkarni

First Class Graduate in Sanskrit, Retired Administrator,

Author of many prize-winning books.

Winner of 'Vidwat Ratna' award.

International Editorial Advisor to U.S. based

India Heritage Research Foundation.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

DR. Arun R. Joshi

Lecturer in History

CO-EDITORS

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Dr. V. V. Gangal

Professor, Somaiya Orient Research Institute,

Bombay

Dr. Vijay V. Bedekar

President Institute For Oriental Study, Thane.

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Part I and II of this Volume are written by Dr.V.V. Gangal. They are specially written to remove certain misconceptions of our History. We consider the Epics to be the records of our ancient history. I record my appreciation of his contribution to this vital subject.

The rest of the book is written by me.

The artist Shri.Satish Khot has drawn a beautiful picture of the Sage Vyasa. He deserves special mention.

Shri. Satish Bhandare, the partner of Chaitnya Typesetting, Thane, Sau. Pratibha More, the operator, have shown initiative in correcting many errors crept unwillingly in the book and deserve special mention for typesetting this volume flawlessly.

I also record my thanks to Shri.Ravindra Prabhu for printing the book neatly.

Thane,
February 7, 1992

S.D. Kulkarni.

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MARXISM IS DEAD

Introduction

I

In this Volume, we have touched upon certain peculiar notions about our History and Culture, for they are still current in the elite circles of our Ancient Land. The biggest misconception amounting almost to a fraud was about our Ancient Chronology. Max Muller distorted it deliberately. We have tried to remove, it by recording weighty evidence in support of our stand-point. There are still very many misconceptions persisting in the thinking sections of our society, because these are advocated by our so called '*progressives*' with leanings towards Marxist interpretation. Our contributor Dr. V. V. Gangal has ably pointed out the hollowness of the foundation of these assumptions. Many of our Indologists who have not been tainted by this notion, still persist in accepting the Aryan immigration theory—the basic premise underlying these, being the destruction of the Indus Civilization – we call it Saraswati-Sindhu Civilization – by the invading nomads, the Aryans. We have, therefore incorporated an analytical chapter on it, pointing out in the sequel that this theory is as dead as dodo. On this background, the readers will appreciate the exploits of the heroes of these two epics as parts of our history. 'The history of ancient India as we find in the Epics is no real history' so these myth-makers proclaim to self alienated progressives? Almost all the Indians however, believe the narration in these as part of authentic Indian history.

The central theme of these great epics : Ramayana and Mahabharata is the protection of Dharma, righteousness and the suppression of Adharma, the evil tendencies. The man has his source in Brahman, the Existential Blissful Eenergy. By nature, therefore, he is inclined to be happy and good to his fellow beings both animate and inanimate. In practice, however, it is found that some are endowed with more strength, more intelligence, and more acumen than the others. Those so endowed tend to develop domineering attitude, which when they attain success results in grabbing propensities. Observing this conflicting tendencies viz. to be good as well as to dominate over others, our ancients organized the social structure in such a way as to put a check on the tendency to dominate and to make his slice of the bread larger than the others.

For this purpose, they put Dharma as the foundation on which to rear the edifice of the society. They defined Dharma as that code of conduct which will sustain the society and secure the welfare of all its units. धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः, *Dharmo dhārayate prajāh*, धारणाद्ध धर्मः इति आहुः *Dhāraṇād dharmah iti āhuḥ*. They further defined it as "चोदनालक्षणार्थो धर्मः *Codanā-lakṣṇārtho dharmah* – Dharma is that which goads man to engage in purposeful activity." Finally they explained Dharma as

the foundational principles of the organization of the society, which would ensure individual welfare coupled with attainment of bliss supreme : अभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः सः हेतुः धर्मः *abhyudayanihśreyasasiddhiḥ saḥ hetuḥ dharmah*.

This is possible when all the members of the society are imbued with the spirit to strive for the welfare of all – “अज्येष्ठासः अकनिष्ठासः एते सं भ्रातरः बभूवुः सौमगाय (Rigveda 5-60-5) *ajyeṣṭhāsaḥ akanīṣṭhāsaḥ ete saṁ bhrātaraḥ vavṛdhuḥ saubhagāya* – Here there is none superior or none inferior. All the brothers have gathered together to increase the well-being of all.”

How to ensure the observance of these principles and the attainment of the common objective of securing the good of all is the real problem. For this purpose they devised the method of allotting work to individuals on the basis of one's aptitude and capacity – गुणकर्मविभागज्ञाः *Guṇa-karmavibhāgaśaḥ* (Gita 4-13). First of all, the needs of the society were analysed. It was found necessary to devise the rules for the actual working of the society. The main objective was the observance of the Dharma. In practice, love for each other, the truthfulness in word and conduct, non-covetousness, cleanliness of body and mind, and control over sense desires – अहिंसा सत्यमस्तेयं शौचं इन्द्रियनिग्रहः *ahimsā, satyam, asteyam, śaucam, indriyanigrahaḥ* – these five rules were laid down as the basic characteristics of the Dharma. These are the broad outlines of what Dharma means. In practice difficulties arise. For example, what is *satya* – truthfulness? If some thief were to ask you to disclose where your valuables are kept, are you supposed to tell him the truth? Again if someone is intent on molesting some one near and dear to you, can you show, love to him? There are many ticklish questions which face you in your daily life. The problem, therefore, arises as to how to interpret these in particular situations. Two dicta are laid down here : (1) Follow the lead of the elders – महाजनो येन गतः स पंथाः *mahajano yena gataḥ saḥ panthāḥ* and (2) listen to those who are very active, learned and have full faith in Brahman, the source of all this creation – क्रियावन्तः श्रोत्रियाः ब्रह्मनिष्ठाः *Kriyāvantaḥ śrotriyaḥ brahmaniṣṭhāḥ*. These latter types are designated as Brāhmaṇas. It is the function of this type to learn and teach the Vedas. This type as well as the others are required to be protected from physical molestation. Otherwise there would be chaos and the society then cannot run on even keel. There would be the law of the jungle. It is therefore stated that for the protection of all, the Lord has created the King – रक्षार्थं अस्य सर्वस्य राजानमसृजत् प्रभुः – *rakṣārtham asya sarvasya rājānam asrjat prabhuḥ*. The King (the ruler) and his officers were called Kshatriyas. Those engaged in productive activities were called the Vaishyas. And the artisans and labourers were designated as the Shudras. This system has been called *Chaturvarnya*. It is the biological axiom that genetics plays an important part in determining the capacity and aptitude of a particular person. So heredity was one

of the factors in determining the *Varna* of a particular person. This system was based on equality and fraternity as laid down by the dictum in Rigveda noted above.

The three *Varnas* Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya were called the *Dwija* i. e. twice born. For they underwent some sacramental rites. It has been laid down that everybody is born a Shudra and after undergoing certain rites, the person becomes *Dwija*. Those who did not undergo *Sanskaras* remained *Sudras*. But they were not considered in any way inferior as Manu has laid down that by birth alone they the *Sudras* are regarded as great, while the others have to acquire greatness by undergoing the sacraments and rigid training for the professions they choose.

A person though born to *Dwija* parents and who has also undergone the *Sanskaras* did not automatically become a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, or a *Vaiśya* unless he has undergone that rigorous training to entitle him to be called as such. A person who does not acquire superior training and does not follow the profession of a Brahmana, a Kshatriya or a *Viashya*, though born of such parents, is designated as a *Dwija Bandhu*—a friend or brother of these *Dwijas*. Such a person is not actually a *Dwija*. Such an unqualified *Dwija* was not entitled to learn *Vedas* for he had not undergone that rigorous training.

It is wrong to suppose that education was denied to any *Varna*. Only the *Vedas* were not within the purview of these. But then even unqualified Brahmanas were not supposed to learn the *Vedas*.

For detailed discussion, see our Vol. XII.

II

Lord Rama and Lord Krishna were the two historical persons who had done their utmost to preserve the social order based on Dharma as defined and described in the earlier section. Because of their blemishless character and strict observance of the rules of righteous behaviour and their capacity to protect the righteous and suppress the evil-doers they were the *Avataras* of Lord Vishnu the sustainer of this vast and varied universe.

Some of the enlightened thinkers of today try to find some blemish in some of the acts of both Rama and Krishna. As far as Rama is concerned, these critics state that the following three sinful acts have been committed by Rama namely : (1) Killing of Vali by issuing a dart from behind, (2) Killing Śambuka engaged in austerities, because he was a *Sudra* and (3) Inhuman treatment of Sita, his wife. Let us consider these here, one by one.

(1) Ravana abducted Sita while Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were staying at Panchavati in the Dandaka forest, while they were exiled. Rama and Lakshmana started southward in search of her. They met a demon Kabandha whom they killed. In his last moments Kabandha told them : "Go to Sugreeva who is now at Rishyamuka hill near the Pampa lake. He will help you in your search."

They met Hanuman, Sugreeva's minister. He told them : "Sugriva is being persecuted by Vali, the Vanara King and who is also his brother. He has also taken his wife Ruma."

Rama then promised to kill Vali and restore to Sugriva his wife. In return Sugriva promised to put at his disposal all the resources of his Kingdom together with the army.

The problem was how to kill Vali. Had he opted for open war with Vali, there would have been two parties, Vali party and Sugriva party. The strength of the Vanaras would have been divided. There would have been constant feud between the two groups and his objective to find out the whereabouts of Sita, would not have been fulfilled. There would have been inordinate delay.

Moreover he had already promised Sugriva to kill Vali and restore to him his Kingdom and wife.

Vali had acted wrongly by taking Sugriva's wife and driving him away through suspicion and anger. So it was imperative for Rama to kill Vali. Rama then acted as a statesman and achieved his objective with minimum loss of blood.

Rama's superiority in strength was not in doubt.

In strictly ethical terms, Rama's action was blameworthy. However, from the larger interest of saving the honour of womanhood and of removing the tyrant Ravana, Rama could not do otherwise. He acted in the interest of preserving the Dharma. Even Vali had himself acknowledged that justice lay with Rama.

(2) Śambuka was a Śūdra. He was practising penance. Rama did not kill him because of the notion that Śūdra had no right to practise penance. There was no such prohibition then or at any time. The only test was that anybody to practise penance had to develop that mental capacity to be able to undergo that rigorous discipline. Sabari a Śūdra woman was practising penance. The sage Matanga was also a Śūdra, Yet he was acknowledged as a sage. Rama had accepted Sabari's hospitality. The sage Valmiki was himself a Śūdra and later on become a sage. What was wrong with Sambuka's practice was that he had been practising it in a prohibited way. He wanted to go to heaven with the same mortal coil he was donning. For this very purpose

Triśanku, Rama's earlier ancestor, had been severely punished by the sage Vasishtha inspite of support of the sage Viśvāmitra secured by Triśanku.

Rama punished Śambūka for that purpose.

Further it is averred by many scholars that the whole of Uttarkanda of Ramayana is a later addition. So this episode of Śambuka has been inserted by some later writer incorporating in it his personal opinion. This was not the opinion of Valmiki or of sages who had the authority to lay down the rules in this regard.

(3) By our standard, Rama's treatment to Sita was unjust, no doubt. But he was the King and vowed to rule according to the strict rules of Dharma. In his personal life he adhered to the principles he preached. He wanted to lead a life above any reproach, so that his subjects would follow his example.

His love for Sita was above every thing other than his love for his subjects. To send Sita to a forest life when she was carrying, was most heart-rending to him. Yet he took that decision in order to stop any criticism about his personal life. Sita herself was aware of this consideration. She tells Lakshmana to convey her message to the King : "Oh King! I know you love me and know me to be very pure. You have however abandoned me from fear of the loose talk of your subjects. Oh king! love your subjects as you love near and dear ones."

This shows that she wanted Rama to be an ideal king. She knew that the ideal life is the fountain-head of miseries. But she wanted to lead it herself and wanted her Rama to do it, come what may.

Rama and Sita both followed the ideal path chalked out by them for them.

Well! we do not get such a couple elsewhere. But that is no reason for us to criticise them.

Let us now turn to the life of Lord Shrikrishna.

There is a big chargesheet levelled against him by Duryodhana when he was on his death-bed. He had said : "You wretch! you son of a slave! your father was a slave of Kamsa. You have no right to move with royalty. You knew that in a fair fight I would have killed Bhima. You instigated him to strike against my thigh, when the rules did not permit such a heinous act. You were the cause of this great war. Left to himself Dharmaraja would have renounced his claim to the throne. You instigated him to fight. You were cause of Bhishma's death. You asked Shikhandin to screen Arjuna. Bhishma had vowed not to throw his arrow at Shikhandin. You deceitfully asked Yudhishtira a fair minded person, to tell a lie that Ashwatthama was killed and

inspired Dhrishtadyumna to behead Drona while he was in a Samadhi. You asked Ghatotkacha to face Karna and made Karna to hurl his last weapon at him and thus saved Arjuna from sure death. Again when Karna had his chariot wheel stuck in mud, you inspired Arjuna to kill him.

"You are the greatest sinner and you accuse me of sinful acts. You made Satyaki to cut Bhurishravasa's neck when he was sitting on the field of battle in a meditation pose. Again you made Jayadratha falsely believe that the Sun had set, when it had not and asked Arjuna to issue a deadly arrow at him."

This is all what has been said against Lord Krishna.

Krishna answered his charges point by point. Krishna told him : "Have you so soon forgotten that I had come to Hastinapura to request you to avoid the war by giving just five villages to the Pandavas when in fact they were the rightful owners of the whole kingdom which you had deceitfully usurped. You were not prepared to grant the Pandavas even needle-point land. Your avarice has been the cause of this war. Even while a young boy, you poisoned Bhima and threw him down in the pond. Then you tried to burn them in the house of lac. You insulted Draupadi in the assembly and showed her your thigh, a dastardly act. Why recall what happened earlier? In this war, when Abhimanyu was singlehandedly fighting without any weapon, you caused his death by asking your warriors to kill him. This alone was sufficient to kill you again and again. For all your wicked acts throughout your life, you are now paying with your life on the battlefield.

"But by this act of bravery you are going to heaven."

Duryodhana smiled and said : "Yet, while on earth I enjoyed the life in full, I have ruled over men, I have studied the Vedas. I have made many gifts to many people. I walked over the heads of my enemies. I have lived a happy life and I shall enjoy my seat in heaven. Now what does it matter if Bhima dances on my head? After a while even crows and vultures will be pecking into my head."

Krishna in anger said : "Yes, the heroes Bhishma, Drona and Karna were killed by unfair means. But when I saw Draupadi in Kamyaka forest, crying and shedding tears profusely, for all insults heaped on her in the open court of that wicked king Dhritrashtra, Bhishma her grandfather-in-law had not the courage to stop the beasts like (you) Duryodhana, Dushasana and Karna from harassing and humiliating her. Drona was required to be killed for the very purpose. Why did Drona join this war and fight on behalf of Duryodhana? Did he not know that Pandavas were in the right? These two great men, therefore, deserved to die. I want to do only one thing : right the wrong done to a

good man. A little *adharma*—unethical conduct—at a right moment is dharma; when wickedness appears invincible, defeat it by any means fair or foul. Ofcourse this decision is a difficult one and is to be taken after due deliberation.”

This was the code of life that Krishna preached and lived for. He had not any private axe to grind. No selfish motive in anything he said or did can be divined. He was virtue incarnate. He would not like the Satan to preach the gospel and walk away with it. The wages of sin have to be paid here and now. He was a man of sterling virtue and impeccable honesty. He was himself a mighty warrior and a tower of strength behind the Pandavas. “The Pandavas are the very life of me,” he had said. Why? For they were wedded to virtuous conduct, come what may.

He revived the life of Parikshita the dead child born to Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna : This was the only miracle he had performed. This was the only way to continue the Pandava line, after that great massacre in the Bharata war. And this he did on the strength of his strict adherence to Dharma.

III

Does war solve any problem? Rama and Krishna both tried to avoid the wars. Did Rama fight for a woman, his woman for that matter? No. It was to undo the wrong done to a woman, that Rama fought the war. Did Krishna instigate the Pandavas to destroy the flower of Bharata of his age? No. It was again to establish the honour of Draupadi who had become a helpless woman, due to the wrong-headed policies pursued by Dharmaraja in the name of Dharma – the truthful and righteous conduct. Dharmaraja loved the game of dice and held the belief that a kshatriya cannot refuse the invitation for it, from another kshatriya, here Duryodhana. He, therefore, accepted it. Even so, he could have refused to play, when Duryodhana had proposed Shakuni his maternal uncle as a proxy for him. Dharmaraja was so blinded by his pledged word to play this game, that he agreed to play with Shakuni, the past master in playing this game deceitfully. He naturally lost. He even went to the length of staking his kingdom, his brothers and himself. He could have stopped at that. But he pledged Draupadi the Queen Empress too. Were all these actions according to the truthful conduct? Is a word given under the wrongful notions of true Dharma required to be honoured? Was the conduct of Bhishma, Drona and Dhritarashtra the elders of the Kuru family in allowing such deceitful practices in open court conducive to the establishment of Dharma amongst their subjects? The simple answer to all these questions is, emphatic

'no'. Draupadi had posed these questions and vehemently asserted that Dharmaraja's conduct as well as the conduct of the Kuru-elders was not according to Dharma. Vidura the wisest man of the time had supported Draupadi. Vikarna, Duryodhana's brother had in unambiguous terms denounced the conduct of everyone in the Kuru-court.

Krishna was away at Dwaraka at that crucial time. He was for Dharma. What Dharmaraja understood or the Kuru-elders understood was not Dharma according to Krishna. Dharma is truthful and righteous conduct. It protects the righteous and suppresses the evil. It overpowers the bully and supports the weak. If it cannot do it, it is not Dharma. Krishna, therefore, did his utmost to avoid the war foisted on the Pandavas by that wicked genius Duryodhana. Bhishma, Drona and Dhritarashtra could have prevented it. They all condemned the wickedness of Duryodhana, but when Duryodhana declared war, they joined it much against their will.

War should be avoided, peace should be the objective. But not at any cost. At least it should not be at the cost of Dharma. That was the objective of Krishna-avatara. And it is as valid now as it was then. It is the bounden duty of a king to pursue this objective – *peace not at any cost.*

IV

Above everything else is Dharma. The age does not make the King, but the King makes the age. If Dharma is practised in toto that is Krita or Satya yuga (age or era). If the intention is there and efforts are made in that direction, that is Treta. In this age there is no undiluted practice of Dharma. In Dvapara the desire to practise Dharma is there, efforts are also being made but there is a large section which is opposed to it and wants to indulge in pure self aggrandisement. In Kali, the section which works purely for selfishness without any qualms of conscience is dominant. The voice of the righteous is very feeble. The King has to choose any one of these ways. If he is wedded to the practice of pure and undiluted Dharma that would be Satya Yuga. Otherwise other ages would prevail.

It is not that a particular timebound period is a particular age. It all depends on the ruler of the day. If we look at the history of the last 1000 years or so, the truth of these Mahabharata delineations of the prevalent characteristics of a particular age would be clear.

In India, the British firmly established their rule. In order to perpetuate their rule, they studied the social structure here and gauged its weak points. They thought that Brahmanas are the Kingpin of this structure.

Yet their number is small. They are dominant not because of their number or muscle strength, but because, the other sections look upon them as the custodians of Dharma—righteousness. The British missionaries were also bent upon the spread of their religion based on dogmatic and irrational beliefs like *Jealous God Judgement Day* etc. It therefore became a political and religious necessity for them to suppress the Brahmanas, a tiny minority, so as to give legitimacy and permanence to their political hegemony.

The ushering in of industrial and technological revolution in the methods of production coincided with the establishment of their political dominance. The old Charutvarnya structure of the Indian society received a severe jolt both because of the industrial and political revolutions ushered in here simultaneously.

Under Chaturvarnya system every social group had security of jobs because professions or avocations were more or less hereditary and every one's bread and butter was secure. Due to the introduction of machines this hereditary job structure was disturbed beyond imagination. Consumer goods were produced in plenty with minimum of labour involved. Every labourer skilled or unskilled became only a cog in the giant production machine. Hereditary professions and avocations became irrelevant. Those with modern technical and clerical type of education had their jobs secure in the new industrial and political structure. Because the Brahmanas' bread was traditionally provided by school or family education of three 'R's, they took to new type of education easily and without much disturbance of their family professions. They were seen in clerical and technical jobs in large numbers under the British administration. In fact, in the initial stages of the British rule, almost all these jobs were monopolised by the Brahmanas, the Kayasthas and a few Kshatriya or high class Marathas (caste which dominated the political structure before the advent of the British rule). The masses, were reduced to almost slave labour in the giant production machine.

In the day to day administration, these clerks or petty officers came in direct contact with the people in general. In the eyes of the masses these clerks and petty officers became virtually the rulers. The British oppressive administrative machine was manned by this petty personnel. This class became responsible for causing hardships to the mass of people, so the masses believed. And this class was mainly constituted of the Brahmana.

The British missionaries saw their chance in this dilapidated old social structure of India and began a virulent propaganda against the Brahmanas. Their propaganda line was : "For centuries these Brahmanas have kept you the masses, out of education and so have monopolised the job-market. The untouchability is also their creation. They are the villains of the

piece. Unless, therefore, this group is suppressed, there is no hope for the masses." This line had a tremendous appeal to the intelligent sections in the non-Brahmin groups. Nay! even the educated sections particularly the Brahmanas, and the Kayasthas churned out of the Macaulay type of liberal English education, developed hatred for the old type of Hindu educational system. These local sections fell a prey to the British propaganda line and became vociferous opponents of everything Hindu. With Marxist thoughts catching the imagination of the British liberals, Marxist line also became the dominant theme of the Indian liberal thought process.

The result was the rise of the anti Brahmana movement particularly in South India with the active British missionary and political support. The onething necessary then was, how to adjust the Indian social structure with the new Industrial production methods. But instead, the British missionaries succeeded in shifting the focus on, how to eliminate the influence of the Brahmanas on the Indian social scene, as if the Brahmanas were a distinct social group, the exploiter class exploiting the rest. It did not strike anyone how a tiny minority of one or two percent can exploit the rest of the 98% of the population. Further, as has been pointed out else-where, the Brahmanas as a group was economically the most backward, their per capita income being lower than that of the so-called backward classes or castes.

The attention of the elite amongst the Indians of all points of view was focussed on this one-point programme namely of removing this influence of the Brahmanas. In effect it meant all that the Hindu stands for, his religion, culture and philosophy, was to be erased from the Hindu mind. The Hindu influence on the Indian masses had come down from tens of thousands of years and so was very deep-rooted. It could not be wished away. Yet the Indian elite was to look upon all what Hindu stands for as the sign of backwardness. The very term Hindu has acquired the connotation of one who is unprogressive. The elite amongst the Hindus became shy of calling themselves Hindus, when his religion, culture and general outlook on life has been through out several millenniums the most rational and progressive. By the passage of time some aberrations like untouchability, child marriage and ban on widow - remarriage did develop, yet except child-marriage, the other two blots were not all-pervasive. Untouchability was not practised in spiritual field. Even saints amongst them arose and were recognised by all classes in the society including the Brahmanas. The rigour of widow-remarriage was also blunted by confining it to the Brahmanas, the Kayasthas and the high-caste Marathas, the others being at liberty not to adopt it.

All these problems are discussed threadbare in our Vol.No.XII, already published.

Dharma—righteous conduct—has been the foundation on which the whole edifice of Hindu society has been reared.

V

Caste not rigid : We have a very interesting and instructive story, about the working of Chaturvarnya in practice. While Krishna was returning to Dwarka after the Bharata war, he met the sage Uttanka. They knew each other previously. When Krishna saw the hermitage of Uttanka, he got down. Uttanka made enquiries about the feud between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Apparently Uttanka had no idea of the holocaust that had taken place at the Kurukshetra battlefield. He concluded that Krishna had not made adequate efforts to avoid the catastrophe. He was greatly pained at the human carnage in that inhuman war. He was on the point of showering curses on him. Krishna just asked him to wait a while and explained in detail the events that led to the war. At Uttanka's request he also revealed to him his infinite splendour by giving him, his cosmic vision. The sage was pacified. Krishna asked him to seek a boon. The sage was always moving about in the forest. He sought of Krishna the boon of easily getting water to drink whenever he felt thirsty. He was granted that boon.

One day while Uttanka was wandering about, he felt very thirsty. While he was in search of water, he remembered the boon. Luckily for him, at that time a Nishada, a low caste man with dirty rags on, was passing by with his five fierce hounds and a waterskin strapped on his shoulders. Nishada (hunter) just enquired and asked : "Are you thirsty? Here is water for you." Uttanka seeing the whole appearance of the person said : "Hi! I don't want it."

The hunter finding that the sage was not reconciled to drink water from his spout, just disappeared. Then Uttanka realised that his up-bringing and penance had not helped him to see Divinity all around. He then remembered Lord Krishna and felt greatly repentent. As his penance was great, Lord Krishna appeared before him just then, with his conch and chakra. Uttanka was highly mortified. He said : "Oh Lord! you put me to a great trial. My penance had not been of any avail." Krishna told him : "I had requested Indra to take Amrita—elixir of immortality to you. He was not prepared to give it to you, a mortal. I then prevailed upon him to give it to you. He agreed on one condition that he would appear before you as a Chandala. I felt that as you had practised severe penance, you would not have any difficulty on this count, but you have let me down."

What does this story indicate? Our ancient sages did not invent

Chaturvarnya to establish the supremacy of the Brahmanas. In fact Brahmana-group was an insignificant minority of the populace. But it had voluntarily accepted a stoic way of life, deliberately taking a vow of poverty and renunciation of power. This was done so that they would lay down by their example the ideal of self control before others. The Kshatriya was also a small group, trained to lay down life for the protection of the masses. The Vaishyas were merchant princes and production executives, catering to all the legitimate needs of the first two groups chosen to administer law, so as to ensure stability of the society and bring about welfare of all. The only responsibility on the Shudras the majority of the populace was to work hard and assist the first three groups in the activities they were required to perform. They were to show respect to them, those belonging to the three Varnas. The ritual is an important part of the man's psyche. He wants certain procedures like methods of worship, forms of prayers and certain personal disciplines so as to establish his rapport with the creator. The Hindus have for that purpose a sub-group amongst the Brahmanas a priestly class to perform these rituals for a fee. The person who pays the fee as the host, gets credit and merit arising out of the performance of these rituals.

Karmakanda, as the ritual practices are termed, is thus confined to a very small minority of the populace. The others are free to follow their professions and avocations leaving the rituals to be performed to this small group.

The Grandsire Bhishma has laid down (please see section on 'King's duties' in the text), the King was also by convention to take 21 members of the Vaishya group and three members of the Shudra group and one person of a special group of Shudras in his ministry, besides 4 from the sage-like Brahmanas and 8 from the Warrior class. So the system though appears hierarchical with Brahmanas at the top, yet it is simply a division of labour according to the aptitude and capacity, enjoining on the upper layer, the virtue of plain living and high thinking.

Such stories as Indra appearing as Chandala are replete in ancient Indian Literature. One such famous one is that of Adi-Shankara's meeting with a Chandala who was Lord Shankara in disguise. These are introduced to impress on all that none is superior and none is inferior. All are equal. Again a Shudra could become a Brahmana and vice-a-versa.

Jealousy : the worst enemy. The importance of Dharma and self-control is brought home to everybody by yet another mythological story. After the end of Bharata War, Yudhishtira was very much grief-stricken. Bhagavan Veda-Vyasa narrated to him an episode in the life of Brihaspati the teacher of Indra and other gods. This he did to impress on Yudhishtira how passions like jealousy consume even the devas, the gods who

are spiritually highly evolved.

Brihaspati the wisest and the most learned amongst the devas, had a brother named *Samvarta* who was also a good and a very learned man. Surprisingly, Brihaspati the wisest developed jealousy for his brother. *Samvarta* had to suffer from the envy of his brother. He, therefore, put on an air of an eccentric and wandered from place to place.

Maruttas of the Ikshvaku line got a great gold mine from Lord Shankara. On obtaining such great wealth, they decided to perform a great yajna. Brihaspati was requested to perform it. Fearing that this great sacrifice would overshadow the gods who were his wards, Brihaspati refused to perform it.

Marutta then approached *Samvarta* Brihaspati's learned brother. When Brihaspati learnt about it, his jealousy for his brother was aroused and this affected his health. Indra noticed it and enquired the cause of his illness. In faltering tones he narrated the cause. Indra was surprised to hear such a story from his great preceptor. He said : "You have got all what one wants. You are respected by all the gods. What is it that can dislodge you from your position ?."

Brihaspati smiled at such a naive question from Indra who had all along been engaged in putting down his rivals. He, therefore, asked Indra to put down *Samvarta*'s growing power.

Indra thereupon sent Fire God to stop the *Yajna* being performed by Marutta. He said if Marutta wanted, he can even request Brihaspati to perform that sacrifice, which he had started, with *Samvarta* as the presiding priest.

When *Samvarta* heard these words from Fire God, he became furious. He commanded Fire to stop this meddling. Otherwise he would burn him. This was an interesting development, a fire being burnt by fire. The point is that the wrath of a pious and spiritually disciplined celibate is more powerful than the fire. Fire God thereupon returned and told about his inability to do as commanded by Indra.

Indra then sent Gandharva to sternly warn Marutta not to proceed with the performance of *yajna*, lest Indra would destroy him. *Samvarta* asked Marutta not to be afraid of Indra. He told him the might of Dharma is more potent than physical might. Brahaspati was also deeply humiliated. He learnt the lesson that righteousness always triumphs.

Satyameva Jayate nāṇṛtam. सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्।

Truth alone triumphs, falsehood or adharma cannot be crowned with success.

This is the society that Ramayana and Mahabharata depict.

PART-I

WHAT CONSTITUTES INDIAN HISTORY?

In the first volume of BHISHMA series, we have only briefly touched this subject. But some scholars have pointed out that we have not referred to the topic, '*Marxist Interpretation of History*.' For example, Dr.D.D.Kosambi lables the authors of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's eleven-volumes history as 'nationalistic'.

He states : "No historian can say everything that happens." This is a commonplace cliché, and no historian worth his salt has ever made such a claim.

I

MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

His main point however is : 'conception of what constitutes history changes with the time, with the class in power.' This is the foundation on which he raises his superstructure. He avers : "It does not matter so much whether the Indus Valley people had a king or not, but did they have the plough, or only a harrow with which to stir the muddy soil or river-flooded land?" He further adds that it is not the kings and wars but the common man and his problems of survival are the real stuff of history.

How are these to be identified and articulated? He¹ himself admits : "All that is known of Kharvela is contained in 17 defaced lines of his own inscription..." What history can one hope to write about the period of an unknown Devadatta, Yajnadatta or Mānavaka i.e. Tom, Dick and Harry?

These historians swear by the 'common man', but when they come to grips about actuality of history, their pre-occupations are : "Ashoka, Mauryan Empire, Gupta Empire, Hiven - Tsang" and so on. Nobody knows the names of lacs that died in the October revolution, but everybody is aware of Lenin, Trotsky and others, the leaders of the revolution. Nobody ever will know the names of the common Russians who did actually suffer in it. We know Stalin. But do we know hundreds and thousands who were deported to suffer in Siberia or detained in mental hospitals?

When we know that in the days of knowledge explosion of the present century, such is the hard fact, what to talk of the earlier days, where facts are difficult to come by? As a matter of fact, in these days the art of historiography becomes much more difficult, for side by side, the art of preparation and falsification of records also

has been admirably perfected.

The Marxists define history as "the record of development in chronological order of basic changes in the means and relations of production." But basically such means have continued to be more or less the same till we come down to the times of Industrial revolution. The Vedas are the earliest records of mankind. These mention plough and ploughshare. And the interrelationship between means and relations of production has also changed a little. At least it had been so in India, because of the restrictions on the Kings' use of absolute power, imposed by the Vidatha, Sabhā and Samiti as explained in the earlier volume (No. I of this series). In other countries, because of the dominance of the feudalistic ruling and priestly classes, the common man had become a sort of slave or serf to serve his master. The point is means of production were the same everywhere but the relations in different regions were different according to the perceptions of the leadership in each of these.

In India, with the advent of Buddhism and its ideas of stricter pollution of touch, untouchability did thrive but its rigours were tempered by allotting this class some definite avenues of gainful employment such as cleaning village roads, protecting the crops and also the borders of the village from thugs and looters, tanning of leather and making articles from it, rope-making and the like. In the spiritual field particularly, untouchability was not recognised due to the efforts of Ādi Śankara.

Again means of production are the part of the inventory – tools the man uses for betterment of his living. To live a life is much more important than these mechanical adjuncts he has invented. It depends on the philosophy of life, the man the thinker develops. The myopic Marxist vision of history would thus not be able to see the history of man – his spiritual as well as temporal well-being. Its vision is bound to be limited. It cannot be comprehensive enough to encompass within its ambit the whole conception of man and his mind.

Because of this restricted vision, these historians cannot appreciate the man living gloriously in his environments as depicted in the R̥gvada, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa. The man had scaled intellectual heights, unsurpassed even by today's man, witness for example his vision of the creation of this universe, as expounded in Nāsadiya Hymn (X-129) of the R̥gveda. His depths of spiritual degradation are also depicted side by side in the demonology developed therein. As far as social life was concerned, the family has been the most important and vital unit of the society. And to strengthen this unit, the woman was given the pride of place in it. In RV.X-85, we find even the newly wed bride designated as the president of the Griha Sabha (the household assembly) exercising control over her husband and the

mother-in-law and all others, through her loving care of all the members of the family.

Kosambi, therefore, in his narrow vision of history bewails and asserts : "The failure of Indus culture to expand is patent." What a pity, this able Marxist has not been able to see its expanse covering the whole of India including some parts of South India, Mesopotamia and other regions of the world! Dr. Buddha Prakash writes : "Thus this civilization, covering an immense area and sharing different shades and places of growth comes out to be the most extensive cultural complex of ancient times. How much more should it have extended so that for the audacious Marxist, its failure to expand would not seem to be so patent?"²

The Maxists' obsession with 'surplus' is pathological. Kosambi in particular rhetorically asks : "Why did they (the Indus Valley people) not produce a surplus comparable to that in Mesopotamia, where a much denser urban population is found in contrast to just two large cities and several tiny settlements of the equally fertile Indus valley?"³

All this is speculative. What is the basis for these statements? Because the archaeologists have been able to dig out these two cities and a few settlements around, these historians rush to sush superficial conclusions. The absence of any such finds cannot prove any statement positive or negative, just as the presence does. Recently near Mehargarh in Baluchistan richer agriculturally developed settlements have been found, and the date of Sindhu-Saraswati civilization is now pushed back to 6000 B.C. (please see our Vol.I-chapter on Saraswati-Sindhu civilization).

II

NO EXPLOITATION

In pre-industrial revolution era the 'surplus' was very nominal. In India particularly, even the ordinary farmer had gold and silver ornaments for use. Even in fedual Europe, the Lord of the manor had to look after the well-being of their serfs. For they depended on these serfs for their labour and protection. Yet it can be said that there was some sort of exploitation in this region with the rise of Christianity. It engendered in the people the beliefs in the dogmas opposed to reason. This religion recognised slavery as God's handiwork. So in a limited sense, it could be said that 'religion was the opium of the masses', for in the name of religion beliefs, none can accept if reason has a free play, were accepted even by the upper class people as God's word. If at all 'religion was opium', it was of all the people and not only of the masses. Even St.Zavier in Goa perpetrated crimes which no hard-boiled decoit would dare. But he did it under the Jesuit oath in the formation of which he himself had a hand (See 'Our Vol.XIII).

In India the concept of 'Dharma' is different from the days of hoary antiquity. When the Lord created the universe, he created man with different aptitudes to sustain and maintain the society on even keel, different person doing different jobs, according to their choice and the situations they were in. It was a division of labour. There was no exploitative class. The Brahmanas were assigned the duty of studying, teaching different arts and sciences including the military. They were also to engage themselves in modes of different worships to different deities who were supposed to preside over different functional aspects of the creation. For example, the Goddess of Learning was conceived and given the name of Saraswati and worshipped as such. Simple modes of worship and rituals were prescribed for the commonality of the Brahmanas other than the Purohitas. Still more simple modes were prescribed for the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas. For the Śudras – the artisan classes and unskilled workers – only *namaskāras* to gods and goddesses and the Brāhmaṇas were prescribed. Of course, that they should not be psychologically deprived of the pleasure of having performed some Puja-worship, they were asked to offer fresh flowers or creeper or plant leaves and Kumkum to the gods. These items are considered auspicious in India. They were also to offer dry food to the Brāhmaṇas who performed these rituals on their behalf.

It is because of this, the Purohitas and the commonality of the Brahmanas were to shun consumerism and not care for the morrow, for they had been assured of bare living by the offer of *dakṣinā* (fee) for what they did for others. Similarly, the Kshatriyas, the ruling class, enjoyed administrative powers, but they were also to lead a simple life and be not after wealth. Only the Vaishyas and the Shudras were allowed to accumulate wealth, yet they had no direct share in the administrative functions and so the money power did not enable them to capture the positions of power. However, out of the 37 ministers of the King 21 were Vaishyas, 4 Shudras, 4 Brahmanas and 8 Kṣatriyas. The interests of the Vaishyas and the Shudras were thus well looked after.

When we talk of the Brahmanas and the Kṣatriyas as enjoying privileged position in the sense that they had the levers of powers in their hands, we have also to remember that all the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas i.e. born of parents belonging to these jātis, could not be included in these classes actually wielding the powers. For only the minority amongst them could be included in these classes. The commonality of the jatis-castes-had to seek other avenues for their living and for this purpose, they were also classed with the Vaishyas and the Shudras.

So it was a neat order, ensuring no exploitation by one or the other. The rule was – *tena tyakten bhujjīthāḥ* "enjoy wealth that belongs to you, don't try to grab what belongs to others." In this matter control over avariciousness was the rule. Thus equitable distribution

of wealth was established in the society.

The question of 'surplus' or 'exploitation of one by the other' did not ordinarily arise. Yet human nature being what it is, constitutional curbs through Vidatha, Samiti, and Sabhā were imposed on those who controlled the levers of power or bags of money.

III

DHARMA IS NOT RELIGION

It is specifically stated in the Upanishads that to protect the weaker sections of the society from being exploited by those possessed of muscle strength and political power that the Creator established the code of Righteous conduct and enjoined on the King and his advisors the duty of following it. Gītā states :

"Paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām, vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge! To protect the weak and the righteous and to destroy the strong but wicked that I appear from time to time. My duty is to establish Dharma i.e. ethical conduct amongst different strata of society."

Dharma as noted above is the code of righteous conduct. It is not religion. The latter is based on some dogmas propounded by some highsouled but domineering personages going under the name and style, 'prophets'. In Dharma the fundamental tenets, man has to follow in his relationship with other members of the society and for his own spiritual well-being, are enshrined. These are based on rationalism. There is no scope for the play of some dogmatic assertions by some demagogue masquerading as a religious leader.

The Marxists formulations of 'surplus', 'class structure', 'exploitation' and 'religion' are based on post-industrial revolution situation arising in Europe. There the feudal and aristocratic classes took advantage of the religious susceptibilities of common man. The priestly classes joined hands with the ruling class and ensured their share in the exploitation of the masses. Instead of basing the whole superstructure of Marxism on these ephemeral and shaky foundations, had they studied the Vedic literature, they would have found ample food for thought and applied the Vedic prescriptions for the ills of the present day society.

The Marxists had predicted the success of the toiling masses in a fully industrially developed societies like England and France. Instead, under the able leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, their idea of revolution succeeded in a totally industrially backward society like the Russian. The leadership of the common man, the toiling masses was seized by Stalin, the ruthless dictator, who heaped tortures and inhuman atrocities

on the Russian masses and intellectuals which would shame even a Chingeez Khan or a Timur-lane.

Stalin perpetrated these crimes against man and his Creator in the name of 'socialism' a creed designed to banish 'exploitation' of man by man. It was intended to usher in 'equitable distribution of wealth.' In actuality, what happened was unheard-of human misery, underproduction, and the ushering in of corrupt bureaucracy. This Creed has therefore been jettisoned in Russia, the El-dorado of Marxism. But the Marxists are a strange lot. When they witnessed that the Marxist regimes in the Eastern Europe have fallen by the wayside, they are now rearranging their thoughts to suit the new situation. In the process, they slur over their own theory trumpeted about that the theory is the head of their revolutionary movement launched in Russia and other countries of the world. Now they propound the theory that these regimes never had any Marxist Credentials, whatever they may mean. They argue that it is the vile bureaucracy which, under the pretence of working out the Marxist creed, had perpetrated the crimes against humanity. It was this ruling junta which had grossly mismanaged the economy and had caused artificial shortages. They have now gone to the length of saying that Marxism was never founded upon the institution of abolition of private property. What it had done was to condemn the role of property in politics. This is what the Vedas had achieved thousands of year prior to Marx.

These theorists overlook the deficiencies in the creed itself. It saps the private initiative, the elixir of freedom and progress. They are unable to explain the built-in mechanism which corrects the distortions in the capitalist economy based on private initiative. The centralised planning ignores the market forces and introduces dictatorial methods in the production process. Marx himself was aware of the ambiguities in his system, but not the Marxists. Because of the overweening ambition of these Pundits, they felt that Marxism has answers to all the problems of human society including those in the spiritual field.

IV

Marxism is dead

The tragedy of these theorists is that there is now none to listen to their bloated rhetoric and act on it. They feel that they have a recipe for a genuine proletarian revolution but there is now no proletariat left to carry it through. On the other hand we have a strange spectacle of the erstwhile socialist regimes aping the methods followed by the capitalist societies including their management techniques. It should be noted that the Vedic conception of *'equitable distribution of wealth'*

not only covers Marx's anxiety to stop exploitation of man by man, but it is wider in amplitude, in as much as it takes into consideration the whole concept of man as a spiritual being. It does not restrict itself only to man's economic considerations. It recognizes the importance of wealth. It advocates more and more production of wealth – *Annam bahu kurvīta* (increase food production) – tell us the Upanishads. But at the same time, it advocates harmony between his temporal and spiritual needs. Man's spiritual life is based on LOVE for each other. Just as a mother would starve herself but feed her children, similarly man should seek the welfare of his fellow-beings and not seek only his personal aggrandizement. He should shun selfishness and strive for the social good, says Gītā.

The Marxists build their edifice on speculation, with the central theme 'exploitation of one class by the other.' They do not recognize man's other natural instinct 'love for his fellow being.'

Kosambi, therefore, talks of 'thief-proof house' of the exploiter class, in Saraswati-Sindhu civilization, which is just the extension of Vedic or Mahābhārata civilization. We do not get much evidence for 'the fortresses of the wealthy – the exploiter class.' The Kings lived in fortresses, but the motive was not to guard his wealth, but to guard his person from his enemies. In fact in India the concept of *Rāmarājya* the state where no exploitation exists at all was developed and every king was supposed to mould his behaviour to this pattern.

Marxists' interpretation suffers from inadequate appreciation of facts and is speculative in the extreme. Facts are also manipulated to suit their theory. So the theory of 'thief-proof houses of the wealthy,' 'the great bath,' the symbols of religion as 'the opium of the masses,' has been built round these. The great bath may be a place of pilgrimage or may even be a common 'bath house' for the artists and craftsmen, to whom it may be convenient being near their work place. For nobody has found statues of gods around these baths. The big mansions with small doors may be the residence of ministers of the State.

The wars described in Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata show that there was no dearth of able-bodied young men who could serve in these large armies. These soldiers came from the commonality of the people. There was no starvation as such in those days. Even the wandering mendicants were also taken care of by the ordinary householders in the villages. The Marxist historians have, however, been able to confuse even otherwise unbiased thinker as Dr. Budha Prakash, who otherwise known as a penetrating analyser sees in the destruction of Indus cities 'unrest of the rural people.' It is now not disputed that the cause of the destruction of the Indus cities was floods caused by tectonic upheavals.

Dr. Kosambi concedes that "the bourgeois approach is scientifically correct, as based upon careful analysis of documents, collation with archaeological remains, inscriptions, coins." But according to him, such a historian introduces 'a quite superficial difference of bias.' He means nationalistic bias. But he forgets that he himself stands squarely on the shoulders of Marx-Engels, Lenin and Stalin, a tradition of a very short duration. He sees through their eyes ignoring facts as they are. His bias is clearly seen in dubbing Sanskrit language as 'indefinite with so many meanings for each word.' When he is unable to find support for his pet theories by referring to Sanskrit works he gets exasperated and heaps blame on its capability of giving different meanings for one word. Every word in Sanskrit in its particular context has only one appropriate meaning. Again it is a rich language. Even to convey one idea, it has so many words, e.g. for horse, Sanskrit has हय, अवा, वाजी, अश्व, and so on.

V

NO SLAVERY IN INDIA

Dr. Kosambi is intrigued at the absence of chattel slavery in India as in classical Greece and Rome. He states, "India had never a classical slave economy in the same sense as in Greece or Rome." He admits that *Dāsa* in *R̥gveda* was not a chattel slave. He points out that "Chattel slavery was completely ruled out by the regulation of *Arthaśāstra*."⁴

This should have enabled Dr. Kosambi to aver that in the Indian Vedic context, 'exploited class' as such was unknown. The simplest explanation for the absence of "chattel slavery" is that the Indian Psyche moulded as it is on the Vedas detests treatment of a fellow human being as a slave. This honest admission could clear much misunderstanding. But then it would entail admission of supremacy of mind over matter. This would sound the death-knell of Marxian doctrine and method.

Dr. Kosambi's mind, enslaved as it has been by the Marxist dogma, cannot get rid of the idea of 'slavery' in Indian context. While describing the class division of the Indus valley people, he says, "the big storage houses are accompanied by mean barracklike quarters which could only have been the dwellings of slaves."⁵

Now scholars have raised doubts and state that the storage house may not be a granary but something else. Even in today's small town we have barrack-like police quarters. Are the police slaves? Dr. Kosambi takes great pains to show how the pastoral raiders, the marauders, i.e. the Aryans, destroyed not only the citadels, but also the religion of the Indus people.

The theory of the Aryans destroying the Indus culture is now dead as dodo. So his assumption that the Aryans starting a new organization of society moving eastwards likewise has no leg to stand upon. He states : "This new organisation of society made available for the first time a supply of labour whose surplus was easily expropriated....." This is only a figment of his wild imagination.

His further elaboration that the Aryans and Dāsas are racial names, is also baseless. After discussing this issue, Dr. Budha Prakash has come to the following conclusion : "Thus it is clear that the word *dasyu* or its variant *dāsa* does not connote people ethnically different from the *so-called* Aryans." Indra and Vṛtra both are sons of Tvasta. Indra is Arya and Vṛtra is dasyu. The heroes of the Dāśarājña battle, Divodāsa and his son Sudas were so called Dāsas. Indra the "wargod" of these marauding Aryans(?) smites down both Āryas and Dāsas.

Rigveda (VI.33-3) notes : "Both races, Oh Indra! of opposing enemies, O Hero, both Ārya and Dāsa have you struck down like woods with well-shot lightnings..... Agni is credited with a similar feat - "All treasures have you won, of plains and mountains and subdued the hatred of Dāsas and Āryas." (X-69-6) Indra and Varuna jointly help Sudas and in so doing "smite and slay his Dāsa and Ārya enemies." (VII-83-1) Sudas won a resounding victory and to him "Indra gave all the provisions" (VII-18-17). Kosambi is quite well-acquainted with the war of the Ten Kings. He has discussed it at some length in his introduction to the study of Indian History (p.94). On page 96 of this work Kosambi speaks of the "formation of a servile class from the conquered Dāsa population." On page 94 of the selfsame book he inform us, while speaking of Divodāsa a King - no less, "that a dāsa had been adopted into the Aryan fold." If Ārya and Dāsa are ethnically different peoples, how can a *dasa* be 'adopted' into the Aryan fold? Let us accept, for the sake of argument, that this feat was somehow accomplished, why was this member of the conquered dāsa population elevated to kingship? Does a king belong to a servile class? After this Divodāsa, his son (or grand son) Sudās becomes King Emperor. So Aryans bestow upon the conquered dāsa enemies hereditary kingship! Not only that, but most famous seers of the day, Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha officiated for him as priests. The tribe of this Sudas, Kosambi informs us, was 'the Tritsus, a subgroup of the Bharatas'. Oldenberg considers Tritsus as Vasiṣṭhas, Geldner recognises in the Tritsus the royal family of Bharatas (Vedic Index-1982-Vol.II-P.95).

According to this Marxist historian : "The dasa by caste had not the right to initiation nor to bear weapons" (op.cit-p.97). Divodāsa was a staunch supporter of the fire ritual. So much so that one of the epithets of Agni in the Rigveda is Divodāsa. Was he doing this fire-ritual without having the right to initiation? And if this right was

denied to him because of his *dāsaness*, what does Kosambi mean by saying that a *dāsa* had been adopted into the Aryan fold? This Divodasa is said to have fought with Paṇis, Parāvatas and Bṛśāyas (R.V.VI-61-1). His son (or grand son) Sudās fought in the battle of ten kings. But Kosambi informs us that the *Dāsa* by caste had no right to bear weapons. Kosambi's '*dāsa* has no property' (op.cit.p.97). The Aitareya Brahmana (7-34-9) recognised him as a great king. The Sāṅkhāyana Śrauta, Sūtra praises his generosity to his priest. Are we to understand that a king was property-less and yet he gave away generously? *Dāsa*, according to Kosambi, was himself the property of the Aryan tribe as a whole, much in the same way as cattle. For him, "In as much as cattle were herded in common and fields very often tilled in common, the use of the *dāsa* as common tribal property is QUITE LOGICAL" (op.cit.P-98). Were Vadhryaśva, Divodāsa, (Pijavana) and Sudās, being kings, yet like cattle, common property to some Aryan tribes?

All this is hopeless muddle. Dr.Kosambi himself asserts, "Not all Dasas were reduced to servitude----- some rose high among the Aryans." His preconceived notions, preformed opinions and his neverfailing methodology have landed this learned Doctor into this mess.

Comrade Dange's '*India from primitive communism to slavery*' has been derisively commented upon by Dr.Kosambi. He asks the comrade, "Did some of the exploited change their colour with retrospective effect?" Comrade Dange had based his thesis of Ārya-*Dāsa* conflict on the colour of the skin. But this charge can be laid at the door of this learned Doctor also, for he talks of the *Dāsa* being adopted in the Aryan family i.e. a black *dāsa* becoming an Aryan king - a fair-skinned one.'

It is hoped that the failure of applied Marxism i.e. communism as a politico-economic system will lead the communist block historians to re-examine their fundamentals. The Marxist method of interpretation of history has no valid basis.

Communism was ushered in Russia in 1917 with great fanfare and as the charter of human liberation. It was presented as a neat and fool-proof system, a machine-like model to end the agony of mankind. The belief that the social progress would always be a stage higher than the earlier as a result of every conflict was reduced to a dogma. Can we say that thesis and antithesis would always produce a qualitatively higher synthesis? The history of India since the advent of the barbarous Muslim invaders and no less exploitative Christian rulers on the scene is a direct proof that Marx's formula was anti-intellectualism—an intellectual disaster. Instead of ushering in the paradise of plenty with the withering of the State, Russia and her satellites witnessed economic stagnation, idleness of the working class along with the most repressive state apparatus in history.

Gorbachov's messianic zeal in dismantling this apparatus has proved

to be a conscious instrument of history to set right this distortion. By this single stroke he has exploded so many myths built around Marxist dogma, namely, class struggle, religion the opium of the masses, the demon capitalism and bourgeois its instrument, and so on.

Can we say that it all is defeat of Marxism? The answer is unequivocal no. The way the Western civilization was fostered under semitic religions repudiating its Vedic past, Marxism came as an antidote to correct these distortions. Capitalism has also generated many myths, democracy, freedom of press, fostering and flowering of individual initiative, and so on. In practice in the name of economic growth, secularism and preservation of the nation state, many evils like the creation of the disturbance of ecological balance, religious fundamentalism, generation of ethnic conflicts, and so on, are eating into the vitals of our society! In the name of science and economic growth, we have become blind to spiritual inheritance of man. Time is fast approaching to slow down the rapacious capitalistic development and unbridled industrialisation. We have now to turn to the Vedic Values of fostering harmony between the spiritual and temporal. To usher in this new era of hope and happiness the lead- role has to be assumed by the Western industrially developed nations. India can give a lead in this respect, provided it brings down its population growth- rate to eradicate its century-old poverty.

VI

CĀTURVARNYA

Let us discuss here one more topic to expose the hollowness of the Marxist method as applied to history. It is Chaturvarṇya or four divisions of human society. Kosambi himself states the reason why this topic deserves special study. "The reason for going deeper into the question on such poor evidence is its bearing on the question of caste formation in general, and particularly the Brahmin caste."

Here the basic fallacy is that Varṇa is caste. However, the whole discussion of the topic of Caturvarṇya is founded on this equation. Let us, therefore, restrict our discussion to caste structure and not Varna formation. Four children born of one and the same parents may each belong to different Varnas. One may be born as a Brahmin, other a Kṣatriya, yet another may be a Vaiśya, while the last may be a Śūdra according to his birth characteristics, his aptitudes inherent in him, and the professions each one follows.

However, the dominant personages, if they have the power and patronage, may manage to give their children the professions they want. This profession may be at variance with the aptitudes one may have been born with. Varṇa is not the same as Jati. Varṇa has basically three

components—heredity, upbringing and environment, the most important being heredity. Heredity constitutes aptitudes, upbringing includes parental influences i.e. *saṁskāras* and environment consists of the social influences one is brought up with. The children of the same parents may differ in hereditary characteristics and so may belong to different *Vaṇas*. The child may be of a different *Varna* than the parents. The genes are the transmitting agents of heredity. What type of genes become dominant at the time of transmission of the sperm to form a foetus may mostly depend on the mood and state of health at the time of physical union of the parents.

The whole discussion of *Vaṇa* system is however centred round the *Jati* – the caste and so we shall have to confine ourselves to this aspect alone. For further discussion see our Vol. XII.

After the advent of the British on the scene, they discovered that the Indian society is caste- oriented. And among the castes, the *Brāhmaṇa*- caste attitudes and behaviour is regarded as the norm one has to follow. The *Brāhmaṇas* by and large were then honest, intelligent and scrupulously ethical in their behaviour. The other castes were therefore beholden to the *Brāhmaṇas*. Max Muller writes, “....during the last twenty years, however, I have had some excellent opportunities of watching a number of scholars under circumstances where it is not difficult to detect a man's character, I mean in literary work, and more particularly in literary controversy. I have watched them carrying on such controversies both among themselves and with certain European scholars, and I feel bound to say that with hardly one exception they have displayed a far greater respect for truth, and a far more manly and generous spirit than we are accustomed to even in Europe and America. They have shown strength but no rudeness, nay, I know that nothing has surprised them as much as the worse invective to which certain Sanskrit scholars have condescended, rudeness of speech being according to their view of human nature, a safe sign not only of bad breeding but want of knowledge. When they were right they have never sneered at their European adversaries. There has been, with few exceptions, no quibbling, no special pleading, no untruthfulness on their part, and certainly none of that low cunning of the scholar who writes down and publishes what he knows perfectly well to be false, and snaps his fingers at those who still value truth and self-respect more highly than victory or applause at any price” (India What It Can Teach Us P- 63).

Max Muller who had earlier done all in his power to condemn the *Brahmaṇas* and the *Vedas* so as to enable the missionaries to usher in Christianity in India, had, at the fag end of his life, been honest enough to acknowledge the unique character the Indian *Brāhmaṇa* scholars had displayed.

The British missionaries to implant Christianity in India and uproot Hinduism (Vedic Sanatana Dharma) from its soil had started, as a matter of policy, a vilification campaign against the Brāhmaṇas. They recognised that once the Brāhmaṇas are shown as demons and the British missionaries as the God- sent gift to India to uplift the down- trodden masses here, from their age- old slavery, not only would their rule be perpetuated, but also Christianity would take firm root in Indian soil.

They therefore, began painting the Brāhmaṇas as arch villians who posed themselves as the leaders of men and this pose had the sanction in the religion of the Hindus. As a natural corollary, Hindum itself was a religion wedded to the perpetuation of the inequitous caste system, they averred.

Suffice it to say that Hinduism or for that matter Chaturvarnya have rational foundations and so it is ridiculous to find in these 'exploiter- exploited relationship'. Brāhmaṇas though occupying a leading position and playing leading role amongst the thinking sections of the society, yet they have never played an exploiter role. In fact they could not do so, for Brāhmaṇas as such, as a caste group had neither political nor money power. By Dharma and tradition, they were supposed to be naturally non - acquisitive. Their claim to play a leading role in society was their non- acquisitive and self- less way of life. Their number never exceeded 1 or 2% of the population. The Vaiśyas and the Śūdras were more affluent as compared to the Brāhmaṇas, as Dr. Ambedkar in his '*Who Were The Shudras*' has pointed out. The Brahmanas were ministers or advisors to the kings of the day. Just as there was only one King there was also one Rajapurohita. So the influence of the Brāhmaṇas as purohita or priestly class rested in their advisory role only.

In the pre- British days, the Marathas were a dominant political power in India. It can truly be said that the British wrested power from the Marathas. And the Prime- Ministers of this Maratha- power were Brāhmaṇas belonging to the Konkanastha sub- group. After the British established their political sway all over India, they needed the educated elite to man the subordinate posts in their administration. Brāhmaṇas generally being in the forefront for acquiring education, they were seen by the masses particularly in Maharashtra as occupying the seats of power, the rest being the Ryot - the ordinary villagers eching their living by tilling their dry soil. The Maratha caste had lost its leading role in administration as well as in the military arm of the Government.

The missionaries started a very virulent propaganda against the caste system in general and the Brahmins in particular. The educated Brahmins

in the Southern state of India, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra were manning the subordinate posts under the British administration. The other caste people had practically no share in these posts. In Karnataka the Lingayats were the dominant community and they were mostly engaged in trade. The other community Vokkaligas were tilling their own lands. In Andhra too, the Khammas and the Reddys, the dominant communities were likewise engaged in trade and agriculture. So the Brahmins there, though engaged in services under the British, had no edge, over the other castes. The problem was rather acute in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. In these two states the missionaries concentrated on a systematic propaganda against the dominance of the Brahmins and painted them as villians who exploited men of other castes for their selfish ends. In Maharashtra particularly, the Brahmins, the Peshawas the ministers of the Maratha kings at Satara were the erstwhile rulers. The kings had actually surrendered all power to their prime ministers who belonged to the Bhat (a Brahmin) family and held their offices on hereditary lines. Though they were born of Brahmin parents, yet by profession they were Kṣatriyas.

Many of the educated Brahmins too had fallen a prey to this propaganda line of the missionaries. Moreover, as these Brahmin servants were also occupying the positions of subordinates to the British ruling class they were perforce required to toe the British line. There were independent men like Krishnashastri Chiplunkar, and his son Vishnushastri, Lokmanya Tilak, Shivarampant Paranjape and others, who had seen through this British - missionary game and were spear-heading the movement for freedom from the British bondage. But there were Justice Ranade, Lokahitavadi Deshmukh and Tilak's colleague Agarkar who were very vociferous in pointing out the defects in the social system of the Hindus, like child-marriage, ban on widow-remarriage, the scourge of untouchability and the like. Tilak emphasized that these defects had to go; and would go but then, these are to be taken care of after Indians won their independence. But these others had convinced themselves that these defects were the cause of their political downfall. This line was very virulently taken up by one non-Brahmin English-educated leader by name Jyotiba Phule (a mali by caste - Malis were engaged in the vegetable-and flower-growing and selling profession). He poured venom against the Brahmins day after day. His writings marked by filthy language depicted the Brahmins as demons who had subjugated others and were living off on the exploitation of non-Brahmins. He organised a *Satya-shodhaka Samaj* - an organization apparently wedded to find out the truth in the social structure but ostensibly formed to vilify the Brahmins as a caste. This caught the imagination of the non-Brahmin Castes particularly the Marathas and the erstwhile congenial atmosphere between different social groups was spoiled. This unfortunate development came as a surprise even to the missionaries. Their design

in patronising Phule had yielded bounty beyond the expectation of their wildest imagination.

The point is that the Marxist dogma of 'class struggle' was not at all a characteristic of Indian society. The phenomenon of adoption of *dāśas* into the Aryan fold exists nowhere except in the fertile but jaundiced imagination of the Marxists. There is no evidence whatsoever for such assertions. Yet this Marxist theoretician, Dr. Kosambi, states grandiloquently. "No urban culture without a class-division has been known till the 20th century socialist revolution" (Introduction P- 59) and further "we shall have to reason out the class structure as well as the production structure" (ibid). This also they do speculatively without adducing even an iota of evidence.

Dr. Kosambi in this context avers : "The brahmin was professional priest, without parallel in Aryan tradition elsewhere. In 'later' India, he acquired 'virtual' monopoly of almost all ritual" (P- 99). Iravati Karve in her 'Hindu society- An Interpretation' has stated often that there were many castes who never invited a 'brahmin' for any of their rituals. Again she asserts that there were many brahmin families who had never practised priest- craft, for generations. Even some of those who practised, they performed these for their subgroups only.

Kosambi also distorts the concept of a sacrifice. He states, : "The ostensible major purpose of sacrifice was success in warfare. A far more secondary purpose was the repression of the struggle of new classes. Vaiśya (settler, husbandman) and the Shūdra (helots) are to be exploited for the advantage of the ruling warrior caste, the Kṣatriya with the Brahmin priest's help" (ibid p- 100).

This is doing great disservice to the Vedic society. It aimed at the welfare of all people of all the Varnas. The thought of economic exploitation could not have even touched anybody's mind, for the simple reason that all members of the society had no economic problem at all.

'Vis' included all people irrespective of their caste or class. These 'people' were not necessarily always 'subjects'. Macdonell and Keith state : "Again in some passages the general sense of 'people' is sufficient" (Vedic Index Vol.II. P- 306). In the foot note to this statement they cite R.V. 6.1.8, 6- 26- 1, 8- 71- 11, 6- 4- 2, 8- 23- 13, 10- 80- 6 etc. The kings were always in the dread of loss of confidence in them by the 'people'. In this connection one may refer to the election and restoration hymns in the Rgveda (10- 124, 10 173 and 174) and Atharvaveda (A.V.1- 9, 1- 24, 3- 3, 4 and 5, 4- 8, 6- 54, 6- 73, 6- 88, 6- 128, 7- 35, 7- 37, 19- 41) where king is often called Indra and he is always careful to retain the trust of the people due to 'Sajātāh- peers' 'pratijana- opponents', 'niṣṭyaḥ - strangers' and 'sapatnāh- rivals." As the monarchy was elective, the loss of confidence

of the people in him would mean his defeat in the Samiti, or deposition or even banishment.

For more details see our Vol.I. chapter on 'Corporate life in the Vedas'. Puranas are just the complementary and supplementary books to the Vedas. No evidence of class-struggle is available in any literature.

This was not primitive communism as Kosambi himself has dubbed it as 'ridiculous' (Annals of B.O.R. Vol.XXIX- 1948).

VII

KING'S SECURITY - WELFARE OF HIS SUBJECTS

Even a great protagonist of imperialism - Kautilya-warns the king or the emperor to consider the welfare of his people as his own welfare (*prajāhite hitam rājnah*). If King is Viṣṇu, so are his subjects as Chanḍeśvara in *Rajanitiśāstra* (17, *prajā viṣnuḥ*), avers. As Thomas Landbald (Journal of Indian History, Golden Jubilee Vol.p.215) states : "Mass participatory democracy springs from the nexus between society and individual in such a way that there is a conciliation between the needs of the individual and the requirements of the organisation of society in the form of state.... Dharma is the sublime expression of both ends and means of the struggle towards real mass participation, democracy."

It is not for nothing that Śukranītisāra (1- 188) declares - "*Śudbhāgabhr̥tya- dāsyatve prajānām ca nṛpaḥ kṛtaḥ* - The king is made (appointed) to take 1/6th share in the wealth for the services he renders to his people." Śāntiparvan (71- 10) of the Mahābhārata, corroborates this view by calling taxation as the *Vetana*, wages, of the King. The King is in effect the servant of the people. The Purāṇas have also spun countless stories around the idea that Indra, the king, is in mortal fear of losing his kingship if he shows deficiencies in his duties to his people. Losing Indra's position (Indrapada) as the king of gods is held as a threat to his counterpart on earth. Even the Brāhmaṇa - works do not conceive the Kingship as unfettered despotism. Once he is elected as the King, he has supreme power over all his subjects, but that power he has to exercise for the good of the people. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa makes this abundantly clear. He and his Śrotṛiya alone are capable of upholding the sacred law and not all Brahmins or Kṣatriyas. The Śāntiparvan (63- 25) also details the Rajadharma - the duties of the King as (1) Punishing the wicked, (2) honouring the good, (3) increasing the treasury in the right way, (4) dealing impartially with litigants and (5) protecting the Kingdom from enemies. These are the five yajñas (sacrificial duties) of the King.

Much should not therefore be read into '*Viśām Attā* - the king consumes

the people', for it is the style of the authors of the Brāhmaṇas to describe different concepts this way. We have seen that the King is always said to be in dread of the people. As a sovereign he has control over all his subjects including the Brahmins and the Kṣatriyas. When we talk of the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas as superior varṇas, we have to remember that only the King and his nobles and a few Purohitis (priests) were superior in status to all including the commonality of the Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas.

Brāhmaṇa – works are purely for ritualistic purposes and a conscientious researcher cannot derive conclusions about 'exploiter' and 'exploited' as Dr. R. S. Sharma has done. Moreover 'Viśām Attā' does not mean 'consumer of the subjects' but 'consumer of whatever is given to him by the people', on par with "śasthāmsbhogin – having right to recover the sixth of the produce." The king for his maintenance and protection of the people is entitled to receive from his subjects, the sixth of their produce by way of taxes, but through these taxes, the king had to maintain temples, resthouses, irrigation works, schools, colleges, universities and monasteries. And such was the strong tradition till lately, as even the Mughals could do little to break it. As pointed out by Dharampal in his *'The Beautiful tree'* the actual receipts were less than 5% of the computed revenue under Jahangir. (See our Vol. No. XIII) The greedy Aurangzeb raised these to 20% but that was due to the imposition of the *jiziya*.

Again the Marxists make much of the role of the *Brahmins* in the society. In Yajña, the priests were dominant and received large sums as *Dakṣiṇa* – the gifts for services. But how many could actually qualify for these posts and how many out of these were actually employed as priests? The number was quite small as the story of *Asvatthāma*, the son of Guru Droṇa, tells us. His mother, the sister of *Kṛpāchārya*, the officiating priest of the Kuru kings, could not afford to maintain a cow to get milk for her son. When through the intervention of *Kripacharya* and further because of the merit of *Droṇa* himself, he was appointed a teacher to the young princes of the *Kurus*, he became *Droṇācārya*. Till then he was a poor brahmin named *Droṇa*.

The *viś* – the common people, the tillers of land, craftsmen and other labourers, and this included the commonality of the Brahmins and the Kṣatriyas also – were better off than the ordinary teachers who were mostly Brahmanas.

Neither later Hinduism nor the Vedic ritualism was based on a church – organization. The *Yajamāna* – the host who performed the sacrifice – was not obliged to enlist the services of particular individuals supplied by an organization comparable to later organized church – based religions. Just as a *yajamāna* (or a King) was 'Dīkṣita – anointed' for a specific

performance, so was a spriest or a team of priests 'chosen' for that performance. When the performance was over and the initiated one – *Dikṣita* took his *avabhṛtha* (ritual bath), his status as a *yajamāna* for that particular ritual was over. The priests had also to merge back into their old identity of brahmin commonality and follow their old vocation such as teaching or tilling his land. He was then very much part of 'Vis'– the common people.

I shall consider here a few illustrative and illuminating statements from S.B. itself :

"For the sacrificer is Prajapati – (the highest human personality) at his own sacrifice, since it is by his order that the priests spread and produce it" (S.B. 1– 6. 1– 20) Here the precedence is given to a *Kṣatriya*:

Now the precedence is given to a Brahmana, "who have studied and teach sacred lore" They were stated to be 'human gods' (S.B. 2– 2, 2– 6); obviously those who had not studied or who did not teach the sacred lore or were not chosen as priests, were not human gods and were not entitled to any *dakṣiṇā*.

It has clearly been enjoined on the *yajamāna* (S.B.4–3, 4– 5) not to "give gifts (*Dakṣiṇā*) to non– officiating but to the officiating priests."

The theoreticians who point the brahmin community as living on the labours of others and doing nothing, should note these brahmanic injunctions. S.B. states "A blameworthy priest should be kept away" (4.2.5.11 and 4.3.4.15). "And these cows of his (sacrificer's) are to be given only to him who is fit to receive a *Dakṣiṇā* and not to him who is unfit" (4.3, 4.33). "And so does he offer that gift which he gives to one learned in scriptures."

Again Brahmins along with Ksatriyas and others are called the wealth in common belonging to the king. *Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā* 10.10, 11.12 gives us this information. And on this *Samhitā* is based the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (S.B.). Here the *Kṣatriya* i.e. the king is held to be supreme amongst his subjects including the Brahmins. (S.B. 5.4.2.7) further elucidates this point thus : "He then pours the remainders (of the water) together into the *Brāhmaṇa*'s vessel and thereby makes Brahmin (the priest) an object of respect after the king." This was the social reality then.

When therefore in *Vaj.Sam* 9.40 – 10.18 occurs a statement "*Somaḥ asmākam brāhmaṇānām rājā*, Soma is the king of us, brahmanas", it does not mean that the brahmins as a community were beyond the pale of the royal authority. Obviously this statement means that while the ritual lasts, *Soma* is the king of the priests for it gives them strength to perform the ritual. Again in S.B. (5.4.3.16) *Soma* is regarded as a *Kṣatriya* and not a Brahmin.

Again *yajña* is not made for 'distribution' of 'surplus' wealth as some Marxists assert. To say so is ridiculous beyond compare. The labour theory of 'value' has not been accepted by all the Marxists. This at least can not be applied to Vedic society, economy or polity.

In the Brahmana period (around 3000 B.C.) King's dependence on his subjects was unmistakable. Even in Kumārila Bhatta's time (600 B.C.) when Varna system had crystalized into castes and the Varna was being recognised by birth, the king's authority was not absolute, much less despotic. His Tantravartika states : "That rulership of a Kingdom, all the four varnas are seen to enjoy, ergo, all are Rājānaḥ." In his time a king would belong to any Varna, including a shudra.

When it is clear that in ancient times, there was no 'class' structure as the Marxists Visualize, Kosambi's statement – "Sometimes the associated internal conflicts were externalised in warfare", cannot have any leg to stand on. Besides, this very serious allegation against that society is made without citing a single example.

Vis', in the Rigveda, occurs nearly 150 times and in all these places, it stands for 'people' in general. Vaishya as a Varna- term occurs only once. So it is wrong to suppose that Vaishya varna alone is subjected to exploitation. Rgveda or for that matter any vedic text envisages equality amongst persons possessing different aptitudes and capacities (R.V.5- 60- 5). All are supposed to work for the common welfare of all. It is therefore downright naivety to talk about Vaiśyas and Śūdras being exploited for the advantage of the ruling warrior caste the Kṣatriya with the Brahmin priest's help, as Kosambi does (op.cit P-100).

In the rite of Sāmidhani the Yajurveda states : "In the case of Rajanya let him repeat the *trcā* thrice, three other types of men are there beside the warrior, the Brāhmaṇa, the Vaiśya, and the Śūdra, verily he makes them obedient to him." If this statement is taken literally then all the Brāhmaṇas, Vaiśyas and the Śūdras would be subservient to the class of Rājanyas who would be the exploiter class and the former would be the exploited. I do not think that even the Marxist interpreter would take such a statement as it is.

What this statement means is that all the others including the commonality of the Kṣatriyas are sub- ordinate to the Rājanya, the King – The term Vaiśya is used in the broader sense and it includes here the commonality of the Kṣatriyas also. This term is akin to *gahapati* of the Pali texts. Rhys Davids and Stade have noted that *gahapati*, as occurring in the stereotyped formulas in pali literature, was a man of private (i.e. non- official) life, classed with *khattiya* and *Brāhmaṇa* as regards social standing and wealth. For example we have "khattiya – *Mahaśāla* – wealthy nobles, *Brahmana Mahāśāla* wealthy Brāhmaṇas,

Gahapati— *Mahāsāla*, wealthy gentry.” Here the term *gahapati* clearly stands for the *Vaiśyas* and the *Sudras* who owned private property. The term *gahapati* means a respectable person. The Pali dictionary explains this term thus : “As regards occupation all respectable businesses are within the sphere of the *gahapati*, most frequently mentioned as such are *Śreṣṭhin* (one readily remembers *Cārudatta*, a Brahmin *gahapati* staying in *śreṣṭhi* — *Chatvara*, among *śreṣṭhins* of all castes), *Kassaka* (farmer) and *Darukammika* (carpenter). This should really convince anybody that the farmers and carpenters (ordinarily regarded as the *Sūdras*) were *gahapatis* i.e. respectable persons with independent means, capable of paying taxes to the State. This Pali lexicon further notes, “The wealth and comfortable living position of a *gahapati* is evident from an expression, *Kalyāṇa* — *bhattika gahapati* — a man accustomed to good food.” Can one imagine that a person of the exploited class would be accustomed to good food?

In the *Dārukammikasutta*, Gautama, the Buddha, asks the carpenter *gahapati* : “Is charity practised in your family?” He answers in the affirmative. (*Anguttara nīkaya* — Bhikku J.Kashyapa, *Chhakanipata* etc. p.99).

Thereafter Gautama describes the carpenter *gahapati* as :

- (1) *Kāmya bhogin* : enjoying the pleasures of the senses.
- (2) *Puttasambādhaśayana* : whose bed is encumbered with sons..
- (3) *Kāśika chandana paccanubhonta* : enjoying Varanasi muslin and sandal paste.
- (4) *Mālagandhavilepanam dhārayanta* : wearing garlands, fragrant unguents and perfumes.
- (5) *Jātarūparajatam sādiyanta* : enjoying gold and silver ware.

If this is the way a carpenter leads his life, can he be said to be a downtrodden *śudra*? Again, in pre- mauryan times (about 1600 BC) “the peasantry had to pay no other tax except *bali*, thus it was not burdened with those taxes on land which are prescribed by the *Arthaśāstra* of *Kauṭilya*. And *bali* originally meant voluntary tax. (Dr. R.S.Sharma — Notes on Land Revenue in the pre- Mauryan period—A— L. O.C. 1957 (part— II) p.93).

It will be seen that even the peasantry (the helots of the Marxists) was not exploited’. Egging translated at least in some places ‘*Vaiśyas*’ as ‘people’. (*Shatapatha Brahmana* part V— 1978 — p.39) Pali lexicographers have noted this as the only possible meaning of the term ‘*Vessa*’ at *Dighanikaya* 3.81, 95 *Samyuttanikaya* 1— 102, 166, 4— 219, 5— 51 *Āṅguttaranikaya* 1— 162, 2— 194, 3— 214, 242 and *Vibhanga* 394. And nobody disputes that the term ‘People’ (*Vis*) includes

the brahmins the kṣatriyas as well as the śudras vis- a- vas the king. The land-owning brahmins and the kṣatriyas were also required to pay taxes. And as Dr. R.S.Sharma, the Marxist thinker, notes : 'The dominant role of the Kshatriyas during this period might suggest that they realised taxes even from the Brāhmaṇa donees' (R.S. Sharma - op.cit.p.92).

There is overwhelming evidence in the R̥gveda that the term Vis stood for all people, where as it is translated as 'race', 'progeny', 'people', 'folk', 'clans' by various translators. Agni is the cowherd of all people (RV 1-94-5, 1-96-4), messenger of the Vis' (RV 1-36-5, 1-44-9) he is the lord of all people - Vis'ām pati or Vis'pati (RV 1-127-8 1-12-2, 1-26-7, 1-27-2, 5-6-5, 7-15-7, 8-103-7, 8-23-14, 1-28-7, 3-3-8) i.e. King of the people. Agni is further described as Viśām Atithi - guest of the people. There are many more such references in the R̥gveda and different deities are seen catering to the various needs of the people. The 'exploiter - exploited' relationship did not at all exist in Vedic, Pauranic, or later times in India.

Even Kosambi indirectly admits that the Brahmins did not belong to the 'exploiter' class. He says : "One of the major purposes of sacrifice was to make the other castes obedient to Kshatriya rulers (T.S. 2-5-10)." This shows that brahmins are clubbed together with the Vaishyas and the Shudras here.

Taitiriya Saṁhitā (T.S.) states, "*trayovā anye rājanīyat puruṣaḥ* three others than rajanya." Here three others are Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Shudras. The rajanya's i.e. King's efforts are directed to make sure, 'these here are *favourably disposed towards him tān eva asma anukar karoti.*' Here *anuka* means '*anukula* - favourable' as Sayanacharya interprets it. The king behaves towards his subjects in such a way that the people develop love for him.

Taitiriya Saṁhitā declares '*paśukāmāḥ vai Vaishyāḥ* - people are desirous of cattle'. This is referred to in several passages in this Saṁhitā. Our Rsis of old were also '*Paśukāmāḥ.*' So the term 'Vaishya' stood for 'common people' and not people of particular caste. In S.B.-3, 1-1-9 it is stated that 'a Brahmana, a Kshatriya and a Vaishya may enter the sacrificial hall.' Here the Sudra is clubbed with Vaishya and all honourable men are entitled to enter the sacrificial hall.

In later Mauryan times the Vaishyas included agriculturists, merchants, cattle - rearers, smiths, carpenters, weavers etc. They had their own guilds - associations and their standing in society was very high, as they used to give huge sums in charity. They used to dig wells, reservoirs, ponds, temples, rest-houses and so on for public use. An exploited class would not have such standing in society. The Chinese traveller Fa-hien refers to hospitals built by the guild of silk weavers. The

seals of Vaiśali refer to guilds of bankers, traders and artisans *sresthi* – *kulika sārthavāha* – *nigama*).

The Kadamba – king Kṛṣṇavarmā II made the grant of a village to a Brāhmaṇa at the request of the śreṣṭhin Haridatta. The shreṣṭhin is described as the performer of *Gosahasra Mahadana* giver of the gift of thousand cows. He was honoured by the King – *rājapūjita*. D.C. Sircar states : “A Ganga king of Orissa is known to have created a *Vaiśya Agrahara* i.e. a free-holding in favour of the mercantile class after receiving 150 silver coins from the donees.” (Studies in political and Administrative systems in Ancient and Medieval India 1973). This is an instance of the period when it is said that the caste system had become rigid (about 800 A.D.). If the Vaiśyas (and this term included Shudraś) was an exploited class in Vedic period, (prior to 3000 B.C.) then now much more should it have been the case in medieval period! We do not have even a faint trace of such exploitation throughout the period of the last 5000 or more years. This class also held positions under the Governments as well as under the panchayata institutions. D.C. Sircar notes : “The chauthias are described as town magistrates... In every town, there is an unpaid magistracy, of which the head is the Nagarseth or Chief-citizen and the four *chauthias* tantamount to Lord-mayor and Alderman, who hold their court in all civil cases”, quoting from the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. It is note-worthy that the *chauthias* were neither Brahmins nor the Kṣatriyas, and yet they held very high positions in the villages. Chauthia is a Panchayat or a tribunal, not created by the Government but by the townsmen themselves. (See our Vol.No.XIII for village – Republics).

VIII

BRAHMANICAL? NO. IT IS VEDIC

It is fashionable to describe the Sunga-Kanva and Gupta periods as Brahmanical revival, whatever the expression may mean, for nobody has clearly defined it. Vaguely it has been suggested with disapproval that it meant (1) revival of the performance of ‘Brahmanical’ sacrifices (2) adherence to the so-called varna-frame, the kings presiding over the prevention of Varna-sankara and (3) degradation of the Sūdras. If the Śuṅgas performed Aśvamedha and therefore earned the dubious distinction of promoting the Brahmanical revival, what about Khāravela, a staunch Jaina calling himself Bhikṣurāja, performing the Rājsūya sacrifice and giving exemption from taxes to Brahmanas and performing Kalpa-Vṛikṣadāna? The said dana-ceremony inter alia entails worship of Brahma, Viṣṇu, Mahēsha, Sūrya, Kāmadeva and his four wives. Can it be said that Kharavela a Jaina king was bringing about Brahmanical revival? He was just following the age-old tradition. There was no

antagonism between the Brahmanas and the Jainas. In fact the Brahmanas adopted the systems of fast and suffering bodily strains (*kāyāklesh*) in the name of certain forms of worship from the Jaina rituals.

These authors either through ignorance or deliberate design pontifically use such terms as Brahmanism and Brahminical to disparage the leaders namely the intellectual elite of those days viz the Brahmins and the like to bring into disrepute the old order to usher in their class-less society, a vague utopian order.

Even the Paramasaugate Kings (Buddhist kings) of the Pāla dynasty are known to have prided themselves as the protectors of Varnāshrama basis of society. They were vigilant to see that Varnāsaṅkara does not set in and sow confusion in social relations all around. The Jainas and the Buddhists were then, as much for the Hindu-way of life as the followers of the Vedic Saṅātana Dharma, dubbed by these special type of historians, as Brahminical. This is an obnoxious term deliberately used by these opponents of the Hindu-way of life to distort the picture of the foundations of the Indian society to usher in their way of life. Here the terms Hindu, Vedic Saṅātana Dharma or the Indian way life are all used to convey the same view namely that the Hindu way as based on the foundation of the Vedas and the Puranas whether one accepts it in so many words or not. Some like the Buddhists or the Jainas may say overtly that they do not accept the authority of the Vedas and yet follow the Vedic way of life. Any intelligent observer of the Indian scene would see that the Jaina-way of life is an integral part of the Hindu way.

Even non-Marxists Indologists like Dr. R. N. Dandekar talk of Manusmṛiti as the gospel of Brahminical revival. If Vedic way of life was Brahminical then what was it that was anti-Brahminical before Manusmṛiti that compelled Manusmṛiti to spearhead the movement for its revival? As we have shown the Buddhist or Jaina way of life was in no way different from the Hindu way.

Manusmṛiti castigates in the strongest terms the Brahmin who is called so because he is born to Brahmin parents. Manu states that he who has not studied the Vedas is not a brahmin and should not be given food in the assembly of the Brahmins (Manu 3-67). So many restrictions are imposed on him so much so that the brahmin's life is austerity incarnate. A Brahmin living by trade is no brahmin (Manu 3-181).

Manu regards a brahmin as superior to others, but that brahmin is not one belonging to that caste, but one who is versed in Dharma i.e. one whose behaviour is according to the rules laid down for him (1-93). His chief duty is to study the Vedas and impart to others what he has studied (1-88). It is true that Manu notes that a Śudra has to serve a brahmin (Manu 1-13). But this is not slavery. The

brahmin lives by learning and he has no other means of acquiring wealth, except what is given to him by those who receive education and other services from him. And the brahmin loses his status even if he takes intoxicating drink once in life-time (11-97). Again he who is known as a brahmin because he is born in that caste is not fit to be a member of the assembly of the learned (12-114). He further lays down that brahmins become śudra if they deviate from their prescribed duties (10-65). The brahmin is defined as basically the friend of all (1-87).

All become śudras if they do not offer worship to gods in the morning and in the evening (2-103). A brahmin who has all his senses under control but has not studied the Vedas is to be preferred to the one who has studied them, but is licentious in his behaviour (2-18). Thus it is clear that he, whose behaviour is not as per ethical rules, cannot enjoy the privileges conferred on brahmins.

Manu's important dictum is that Brahmin is he who has studied the Vedas i.e. he who has acquired the knowledge. Kṣatriya is he who is possessed of valour, and the Vaiśya's greatness lies in his acquiring wealth by hard work and fair means. But Śūdra is great by birth alone, for he possesses the capacity to work hard and produce wealth and render services to others who badly need them. This is for the betterment of society itself. So a brahmin who does not study or impart knowledge he possesses to others is not a brahmin at all (2-155).

This term 'Brahminical revival' has been coined by the European Indologists deliberately to facilitate the Christian missionary design for spreading Christianity by downgrading Hinduism as the cult designed by the wicked Brahmins to further their selfish ends. We have shown that all the Varnas in the Vedic Hindu system of social organisation had equal status. But in actuality as the Brahmins were thinkers and the mainstay of the Hindu society, they were given a higher status. Here we have to remember that all caste Brahmins were not given such status. But only those, who were real Brahmins by their profession, were given such a status. The commonality of Brahmins and Kṣatriyas were on par with the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras.

However, these detractors of the Hindu system single out a passage from Aitareya Brahmana namely, "a Vaiśya, a tributary to another, to be eaten by another.... a Śūdra the servant of another to be removed at will... to be slain at will", and triumphantly state that the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras were just helots or drawers of water and hewers of wood in the service the Brahmanas and the Kṣatriyas. It is not at all so.

This does not mean that a Kṣatriya or a Brahmin can act whimsically and kill anybody at will. When these were acting in a way against

their caste rule, they were to be so treated. Too much should not be read into such statements, as there are other statements in Mahabharata where it is stated that a brahmana not practising penance and a vaishya not contributing to charities should be drowned in a well by tying heavy stone round their necks.

Similar is the case with the oft quoted passage from Manusmriti (8-417). It lays down : "A Sūdra has no property of his own, his wealth may be taken away by his master." This direction comes at the end of the section dealing with the types of servants (slaves is not the proper translation of the term *Dāsa*) (8-410 to 417).

A general statement about the duties of Vaiśyas and the Shudras, is cultivation and trade by the Vaiśya and general labour work by a Sūdra. The king has to see that every one carries out his avocation or profession properly (410). Here the term Sūdra has no derogatory meaning as it has acquired after the advent of British on the scene. By 411 - duty is cast on the Brāhmaṇa to see that a Kṣatriya or a Vaishya in distress is helped by giving him necessary assistance, say, by pleading with the king that unemployment of these is not good in the interests of the good of the society. This cannot mean that a Brahmana has to part with his wealth to feed those who are in distress. For the Brahman himself has to keep provision with him which is sufficient for a few days, the maximum period being three years (4-15 and 11-7).

If, however, a Brāhmaṇa misuses his position and humiliates a Kṣatriya or Vaiśya by asking him to perform menial duties at his household, the king is enjoined to fine such a person 600 panas. But a śudra being by profession a servant of the other three varnas can be asked by a Brahmana to do menial duties at his place, but he is paid for his service. Then some particular types of *Dāsas* or servants are noted in verse 415. They are : (1) Conquered in war, (2) staying at somebody's house for getting his food and other necessities, (3) son of a keep, (4) employed on wages, (5) transferred by some one else. (6) in employment in the family for a long period, and (7) the one fined to pay a certain sum. He becomes the servant till the payment of fine is complete. The Brāhmaṇa is told to enjoy the property of the servant as long as he is with him (416-417).

It would be seen from the whole context that the servant like the Brahmin's wife or the son cannot have independent property. The servant is just a member of that family. If he were to leave the job he would be given some compensation so that he would not starve till he found another avocation. There is nothing in this which can smack of Brahmin or Kṣatriya hegemony over the others. And Manu cannot be accused as one who led the Brahmanical revival.

The Śūngas and Kaṇvas were Brahmins by birth but were Kṣatriya by profession. They cannot be the cause of any revival Brahmanical or otherwise. It is said that this Brahmanical diabolic plot reached its zenith under the Guptas, avowedly Kshatriya (or Vaishya) kings. Again these Guptas were the successors to the Andhras who ruled for 506 years after the Kanvas. No Brahmin was involved in the overthrow of the Andhras by the Guptas so to talk of any plot by the Brāhmaṇas is ridiculous in the extreme. The Christian missionary scholars go to the length of saying that this plot had its heyday till the advent of the British i.e. from 1218 B.C. (advent of the Śūngas) to 1818 A.D., well over 3000 years. Another surprising fact is that our Indian Indologists mostly Brahmin by birth subscribe to such a missionary theory! Is any comment necessary? (See our Vol. XIII where with documentary evidence – reports of British officers, it is shown that the British impoverished the Indians.

In India, a king unlike his European counterpart did not have even notional ownership over the cultivable land. If at all he needed any land for the use of the state or otherwise, he had to purchase like any other citizen. The Vaiśyas and the Śūdras were property owners even in those remote days. The Gupta Kings originally came from the Vaishya varna and then became Kṣatriyas, just as the Śūngas and the Kaṇvas became Kṣatriyas when originally they were of the Brahmana Varna. Manu (10-40) states that the caste or varna of a person is known by his profession. It is only through the loss of upbringing (Saṁskāra and Kriyaloka) that even the Kṣatriya, Vaishya or a Brahmana becomes a Shudra (10-43 & 45).

These biased historians ignore the fact that even share-cropper Shudra cannot be dispossessed of the land he cultivates, even by a King (See Epigraphic India Vol. VIII No. 12). Land grants of central India refer to tax-paying Kuṭumbins (Kuṇbis of the later days) and Karus. These belonged to all the Varnas. The Khoh copperplate grant of Maharaja Sarvanatha of 512 A.D. (D.C. Sirkar op-cit-p31) records such a grant. The King directs the Brahmin Kutumbins along with the Shudra Karus, the cultivators to pay to the donees whatever dues they were paying previously to the state.

The Śūdra not only was not Yathākāma-vadhya (to be killed at will) but was a respectable tax-payer. Various inscriptions (India as reflected in the inscriptions of Gupta period p.16-17) show that black-smiths, leather workers, weavers and barbers, all belonging to the Śūdra class were tax-payers. Guild of silk-weavers and oil-men were rich enough to make grants to temples. Why, there were even Śūdra rulers in Saurashtra, Avanti, Arbuda and Malwa. The Kukila Śūdras even sat on the district advisory councils. In actual practice no Varna-distinction was made in the administration of law as is evidenced by an Inscription

of the 6th Century A.D. in Western India. (If Śūdra was the oppressed and the down – trodden then Smritis (Manu 8-337-387 and authors quoted by P.V. Kane in the History of Dharmashastra Vol.III P.1267) would not prescribe in reverse order viz fines a Śūdra thief eight times the value of the stolen property, and Vaiśya, Kṣatriya, Brahmana, 16, 32, 64 times respectively. Moreover, imposition of fine implies that the Śūdra could pay and hold private property or means of income wherewith to pay the fine.

IX

SHUDRA – A COMMANDER

Kautilya recommends the enlistment of Śūdras in the army. While commenting on the Śatapatha Brahmana (5-3-1-1) Sayana has called Senani a Śūdra. But, Dr.R.S. Sharma ascribes this to 'brahmanical antipathy towards the warrior class' and states that 'this cannot be taken seriously'. (Aspects of political ideas and institutions in Ancient India P.135). This is a downright facile and a vile canard. It cannot stand a moment's scrutiny. We have just seen above that the Shungas and the Kanvas were the Brahmins and yet were commanders in the armies of the previous kings. The same Dr.Sharma refers to republics wherein the Kṣatriya aristocracy ranked higher in the social scale than the Brahmanas and Grahapatis (Ibid-174-75). When scores of Smritis describe king as made up of parts of various deities, are they looking up to him as god or are they exhibiting 'brahmanical antipathy towards the warrior class'? To suggest that, Sayana, who was revered and patronised by Kampa, a Vijayanagar ruler, a Kṣatriya to have had 'brahmanical antipathy to warrior class' is preposterous. Sayana has nowhere in his commentaries on the Vedas, shown this Brahmanical antipathy to Kṣatriyas. Moreover, Marxist historians go all out to prove that Brahmanas and Kṣatriyas intentionally colluded to oppress the Vaiśyas and Śūdras. If this were so, Sayana a Brahmin would not note a Senani a Śūdra in such an important ceremony as Ratnahavis. It is clear that even in Sayana's times (circa 1400 A.D) Śūdra was not a derogatory term. Śūdra after all was a part of the Arya society, upon Kautilya's assertion. Even the property of an untouchable was sacrosanct and Kings did not or could not confiscate it at will. In Rajatarangini, "only one Indian chronicle worth the name" according to Dr.Kosambi (op-cit P.2) (IV.55)" there is an account which deserves notice. Rajatarangini enjoys certification by Dr.Kosambi, "so neatly substantiated by archaeology and local place names." The Rajatarangini account is of King Candrapida. His officers started the construction of a temple of Tribhuvanavamin. A Charmakara's hut stood on the plot. The Charmakara was offered money to vacate it. He refused to oblige. The matter was reported to Chandrapida. He scolded the officers first and advised them : "Stop the construction

or build somewhere else; by seizing the land of another, you would taranish an act of piety”(ibid P.39). The council of ministers then sent a messenger to the humble leather-worker and the latter said, “I would like to see the King.” The king gave him audience and said : “Ask for a better house or a large sum of money.” The Charmakara replied : “I cannot bear to see my hut, witness, like mother, of my happiness and sorrow, razed to the ground. However, if your majesty, comes to my house and asks for it, I would give it.” The king complied and the house was bought. This actual incident narrated by Kalhana requires to be matched against manu to get the correct meaning out of the statement of Manusmriti : “A Sudra has no property of his own, his wealth may be taken away by his master”, such a favourite interpretation with Marxist and other progressive historians. Here it is not even a Shudra of the Arya group but a Charmakara who calls himself *asprishya* (untouchable) has full ownership of his house. It could not be forcibly acquired by royal officers or the council of ministers or even by the king himself. Dr. Kosambi never tires of quoting Manusmriti. But he does not mention this actual incident from an avowedly good chronicle. Let us now turn to the other most important characteristic of the so-called brahmanical counter-revolution. “Prevention of Varna – saṅkara,” has been pronounced as the mission of life of the rulers. It deserves to be investigated in detail.

IX

VARNA-SAṅKARA

In the Varna scheme of things, theoretically only a Kshatriya could become a King. In actual practice, there were Brahmana kings from early times. In later times even shudras were kings. Varnasaṅkara arises, when there are inter-Varna or Sagotra marriages or by neglect of duties peculiar to one’s Varna, according to Manu (10-24).

In practice, however, there were frequent inter-varna marriages between the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas. More-over, inter-varna marriages, though frowned upon, if contracted voluntarily through mutual love and attraction between the parties concerned, did not come under the perview of Varna-Sankara (promiscuous marriages). Otherwise in Vedic days, the marriage between the sage Agasti and Lopamudra, a Kshatriya princess, or the marriage between the sage Gautama and Ahalya, again a Kshatriya princess, were not looked down upon. Again the marriage between Devayani the daughter of Shukracharya the teacher of the Daitya Kings and Yayati the scion of the Kshatriya dynasty of the Kurus did not attract the charge of Varna-Sankara. Arjuna, the Mahabharata hero who refuses to fight on the ground of Varna-Sankara had married Ulupi a daughter of a Naga chieftan and Bhima another Pandava hero

had married Hidimba a demoness.

Varna-Sankara, therefore, meant the disturbed state of society in which nobody was able to separate the chaff from the grain. Vasistha - Dharma Sutra (19-7-8) enjoins upon the king to punish those who do not perform their duties according to the norms of the Varna to which they belong. If the meaning of Varna-Sankara is taken as is described in the Dharma Sastras, these Brahmin-kings should have punished themselves first or rather should not have taken to the duties of Kshatriyas. And yet, they are said to have prevented Varna-Sankara. Varna-Sankara of the theoretical reckoning had come to stay ineradicably even at the time of the Mahabharata. Laments Yudhisthira (Vanaparva 177-26-27-28), "It appears to me that it is very difficult to ascertain the caste of human beings on account of the confusion of all Varnas, all sorts of men are always begetting offspring from all sorts of women. Speech, sexual intercourse, being born and die - these are common to all human beings and there is scriptural authority (for this view) in the word, 'We, whoever we are, offer the sacrifice.'" Greek authors have spoken of Shudra (Sodrai) Oligarchies and republics among others. Manu enjoins (4-61) upon Brahmanas not to dwell in the Kingdom of a Shudra. Whatever else this injunction means, one admission on the part of Manu is clear enough - that there were Shudra-Kings, a contradiction in terms if we take the accepted meaning of the term Varna-Sankara. There were Shudra rulers of Saurashtra, Avanti, Arbuda Malwa. Hiuen Tsang has recorded that there were Vaishya kings at Thanesar and Paryatra and Shudra Kings at Matipura and Sindh. This was Varna-Sankara galore according to the accepted meaning of the term. As to the other aspect of Varna-Sankara also, these Kings are not above reproach (vide B.V.B.H.C. IP. Vol. III (1970) P567 F.No.7.). Prabhavati Gupta (possibly Vaishya) married Rudrasena of Brahmana Vakataka dynasty. Daughters of Kakutsha-varman of Brahmana-Kadamba dynasty also were married to a Gupta (possibly Vais'ya) and other Kings. Brahmana Soma, ancestor of minister of the Vakataka ruler Devasena had married Brahmana and Kshatriya wives. The maternal uncle of the East Bengal ruler Lokanatha was a Brahmana, but begot a son by a Shudra wife. Daughter of the Vais'ya King Harsha married the Kshatriya prince of Valabhi. (Bana's father had married a Shudra wife and had two sons by her living in the same household). The fact, therefore, is that these kings practised Varna-Sankar even in the restricted sense of marriage - relationships. What qualification did they have to call themselves 'preventers of Varna Sankara?'

The acme of anomaly was reached when staunchest Buddhists assumed the title. It is fashionable among historians of all hues to state that Gautama, the Buddha, opposed if not uprooted Chaturvarnya. Though it is patently false, it has gained currency and yet we have Pala emperors

of Bengal and Bihar styling themselves as *parama-saugata* and also as preventers of Varna-Sankara. If prevention of Varna-Sankara is one of the so-called Brahmanical values, why were these Buddhist Kings accepting and promoting it? Were they also enthusiastic revivers of Brahmanism? It is strange that such a perceptive scholar as D.C. Sircar (Studies in the Religious life of Ancient and Medieval India P.187) has only this to say, "It is however interesting to note that, like typically zealous Kings avowing the Brahmanical faith, the Palas were eager to suppress, the social evil styled Varna-Sankara." (with a foot-note - Gauda lekha mata p.36 (Monghyr plate of Devapal's verse 36). It is just an INTERESTING piece of information! It never occurred to our scholars to delve deeper into the ideas of 'Brahmanical revival' and 'Prevention of Varna-Sankara' as the *sine qua non* of the former.

If the most pernicious aspect of Varna-Sankara is marrying outside one's Varna, or having sexual intercourse with men or women of other varna, ARJUNA, of all the persons, was the least qualified to be overly worried about it, as he does in the Bhagavadgita. In his Tirthayatra, Arjuna, a Kshatriya, married Ulupi, a Naga woman. Bhima had married Hidimba, a Raksasa woman. Arjuna's father was born out of levirate of Ambalika and Vyasa. Who was this Vyasa? Parasara had begotten him from Satyavati, out of wedlock. Satyavati was the daughter of a fisherman.

The self-same Vyasa gives one definition of Varna-Sankara "Varna-Sankara occurs when one approaches (sexually) a woman who should not be so approached" (M.BH-13-48-19). So his father had committed Varna-sankara. Paraśara's own birth is shrouded in mystery. As stated above, Arjuna had no right to complain about the Varna-Sankara, in the ordinary sense a result of a great war.

None of the hundreds of commentators of the Bhagwadgita has tried to explain this anomaly; none of the Acaryas, not Jñanesvara, nor Tilak, nor Gandhi, nor Chinmayananda, none! The meaning that they assume is utterly in-applicable. Mahabharata contains stories such as that of Chitramukha, (vide entries under names in Prāchīna Charitrā Kosha-Siddhesvara Shastri Chitrava) who was at first a Vaiśya, then became a Brahmana and then a Brahmarshi, of Vitahavya who was a Kshatriya and became Brahmana and Brahmarshi, of Bhalananda who was a Vaiśya and a seer and who became a Brahmana. Pancavimsha Brahmana (13-4-15 to 17) narrates the story of three that survived after Indra offered the Yatis to wolves. Indra promised to protect them. Indra made one of them Brahmana, the other Kshatriya and the third Vaishya. Such examples can be cited by hundreds from the Vedic, Epic, Puranic and epigraphic records giving a complete lie to the accepted notion of Varna-Sankara.

To suggest what was really meant by Varna-Saṅkara and how Buddhist Kings swore by the prevention of the same is the confused state of the society. Varna-Saṅkara is sometimes translated as 'confusion of castes'. It is not so. The King's duty was to afford the subjects peaceful life, in other words maintenance of law and order. Varna-Saṅkara was chaos, lawlessness, and disorderliness. Prevention of these was the prevention of Varna-Saṅkara. Indian culture had always acknowledged change. A smooth deviation from the established norm, accepted by the parties concerned, accepted or connived at by the communities affected, not causing disruption or an upheaval on the society, was tacitly permitted. If the deviation gained currency, that became the established custom (Dharma). Numerous instances can be cited as to what Manu (and others) deigned to enjoin and what actually obtained in the society.

One example will suffice. By no stretch of sophistry can marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter be brought within the rules of Sagotra, Sapinda, and yet it was current in a large number of communities of Hindus. Manu (or any other Smṛitikara) was not a law-giver like Hamurabi. It is wrong to suppose and state that somebody *permitted* marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter. Instances took place, the parties concerned were happy, the communities concerned did not object. The deviation from Manu-norm thus just existed or was allowed to come into being. The custom prevailed even among such communities as paid profound lip-service to Manu. This is how the Indian society had evolved the system for accommodating change, not consciously but through the operation of the spirit behind '*ekam sat viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti*': The Mahabharata has long discourses on King's duties. If we forget the restricted sense of Varna-sankara, the Shantiparvan (15-32-33) spells it out in terms that I have suggested. "It would be like blinding darkness, nothing would be understood (as distinct from the other) if there were no Danda discriminating between good and evil. Even those who are non-believers or Veda-revilers, limit transgressions so they also can live and enjoy life (if the king is vigilant)." The meaning is very clear. When the society, at large, cannot discriminate between good and evil i.e. what is absolute good, what is permissible, what can be connived at and what is down-right evil, - that we cannot tell one from the other, as happens in complete darkness. Some particular minor events that would occur due to this confusion are also spelt out (M.BH.12-15-36-37-38) "If the birds and beasts (of prey) were not afraid of the rod (of punishment), they would devour animals and men and sacrificial materials and oblations, a student would not study, cow would not yield milk, girl would have no proper marriage, there would be deluge of all (Vishvalopah) dams would break, nobody would know what is his (property)... servants would not obey, children would not abide by the words of the father (verse 42), and so on. The

wider connotation and implication of Varna-Sankara thus was absence of law and order in the society, and mere 'confusion of castes' or 'mixture of castes' was a very insignificant, minor detail of it, not taken seriously, in real situations, but blown out of all proportions by the Indologists in theoretical discussions, especially while floating theories like Brahmanical revival etc.

Dr. Kosambi has noted these things but failed to come to the inevitable, right conclusion. He states : "Two Kshatriya Merchants established a temple of the sun in Bulandshahr district of U.P. (Fleet 16) which a Brahmin endowed with a perpetual lamp in A.D. 465-6. This is completely against standard Brahmin and Kshatriya caste practice. What should caste mean, when a fighting ruler like Gotamiputra Shatakarni claimed himself to be the unique brahmin" (copy-at P.317)? Another Shatakarni of the same period married the daughter of the shaka, a foreigner, Rudradaman. Like her father Rudradaman, the Princess showed more versatility in Sanskrit (Luders 994 at Kanheri) than all the Shatavahanas put together. Nevertheless Vasithiputra Pulumayi a Shatakarni claimed to have "put an end to the intermixture of castes."

The "Kshatriya Merchants" of the above epigraph or the Brahmana Shresthin (viz Charudatta) of the dramatic literature, were ground realities of life, notwithstanding the Smriti -theorisations according to which these expressions would not only be figurative contradictions in terms, but the very travesty of the accepted notions of Varna dharma. They were not only tolerated or connived at, but celebrated and cherished. Smriti theorisations were idealists views propounded by the particular sages who composed these. These were never impediments in bringing about a non-violent change in the practices, one desired.

We shall be unable to perceive our history correctly unless we remove from our vision such blemishes as these facile and mischievously planted notions like hierarchical structure, exploitation Varna-dharma, Varna-Sankara, hey-day of Buddhism, revival of Brahmanism, and so on. It will be hopeless to endeavour to redefine these concepts, for there has arisen such a thick overgrowth of associated (and pernicious) notions which have become part of our mental habits. They must be jettisoned. Attempt is made in the following pages to look at and to set forth our Vedic-epic past 'as it was' (iti ha asa).

Part II

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INDIAN HISTORY

It is truism to state that even scientists and men of true learning, once they have comfortably settled with a certain theory, are unwilling to abandon it even when certain unimpeachable facts come to their notice. It is more so with the scholars who claim to have established some such dogmas masquerading as scientific theories. The Darwinists or the Marxists of today belong to this latter category.

Our elite have become so "comfortably settled" in the theory of linear progress of living creatures – Darwinism, or 'all history being the history of class 'struggle' – Marxist, – applying with great erudition their 'dialectical' or 'statistical' methods that they are deeply unwilling to admit that there might be anything wrong with it.'

After disposing of Marxist Historians' ill-digested theories about Ancient Indian History, it is necessary to remove some of the further misconceptions about it caused by the writing of such eminent personalities as Pandit Nehru, Independent India's first Prime Minister, and Dr. Ambedkar, scholar-politician and acknowledged leader of some prominent sections of the erst-while untouchable community.

Both of them were not serious historians for they were active politicians and so they could not find time for such specialised disciplines as the study of History. They had an aptitude for the study of history and P. Nehru especially found time to write his 'Letters to his daughter' later published under the title – 'Discovery of India', while he was in British Jail during the Struggle for India's freedom. Dr. Ambedkar was himself no student of Sanskrit, and he had to rely for his ideas on westerners' translations of the Vedas and other ancient Indian literature mostly written in Sanskrit. These translations were admittedly made to – tarnish the image of Vedic Hinduism as evidenced by Max Muller's published letters to his wife. P. Nehru had also relied on this – biased material.

P. Nehru was very candid in admitting the deficiencies in his work. He states : "It is a year and a quarter since I finished writing this book (Discovery of India) and some parts of it are already somewhat out of date." It was first published on December 29, 1945 (Allahabad 1945 P. VII).

Ordinarily we would not have taken cognisance of the writings of these leaders of immense stature, but for the fact that they are retailed out as serious historical writings in the usual media and in various foreign languages even in this last decade of this century.

Here are some of these misstatements from Nehru's Discovery of India :

- 1) The usual date accepted by most scholars today for the hymns of the Rigveda is 1500 B.C.¹
- 2) Vedas were the outpourings of the Aryans as they streamed into the rich land of India.²
- 3) The Vedas represent unfolding of human mind in the earliest stages of thought.
- 4) What impresses Nehru the most in the Vedas is : "There is no idolatry in them; no temples for the gods."³
- 5) The Vedas were against image-worship."⁴

None of these statements are true to history.

- 1) As is shown amply in the First Volume of our series, 1500 B.C. as the most accepted date of the Rgveda is ridiculous.
- 2&3) That the Vedas were the outpourings of the Aryans as they streamed into the rich land of India, is a statement riddled with many absurdities. Nehru does not specify what sort of outpourings these were. Presumably they were the outpourings of barbarians unhesitatingly termed as 'marauders' by the westerners and their Indian followers. Without summoning Dayananda and Aurobindo also as our witnesses, we can now name scores of scholars whose estimation of the Rgveda is much higher than this.
- 4&5) Nehru refers to the absence of Image-worship as if that was the chief, if not the only, claim of Vedas to respectability. Moreover, Nehru's statement that the Vedas were against Image-worship is anachronistic and not true to actual facts. He has asserted⁵, that image-worship came to India from Greece via Buddhism and it never existed in the Vedic Age. There is no dispute that Buddhism was founded much later than the Vedic period. Then Nehru's statement that the Vedic people were "opposed" to image-worship is about something that did not exist.

But the fact is that the Vedas contain many references to idol worship. I shall quote here a few :

"Oh Rudra! you the protector who stay in the mountain fortress and who torment the enemies, look upon us with a kindly eye. Our body exhibits happiness. Your form is peaceful and auspicious and no sin can touch you. It is because of these qualities, your body removes our ills."

There are further references like :

"I bow to you whose neck is darkened as you had taken poison lest it harms other creatures. The other side of your neck is cool

and white.”

“I bow to you with your hair knotted on your head.” There are many more such descriptions.

In Rgveda 2.33.4 33-4 we have :

“Oh Rudra! You are best among medicine men kindly give strength to our men through your choice medicines.”

“In RV.6.22.17, we have :

“This Lord Vishnu strode this universe and occupied it with his three steps. This whole universe is covered by the dust of his steps.”

In RV.4-24-10, the sage offers his Indra in exchange for ten cows. Now it is a clear statement about the image of Indra – being bargained for ten cows. In RV.4-23-6 the sage talks of the Indra’s body being very lustrous.

In Smriti literature there are umpteen number of references about image worship.

To Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : “The Vedas are a worthless set of books.”⁶ “In the Vedas there are more vices and few virtues.”⁷ As to philosophy, “there is nothing of it in the Rgveda.”⁸ Ambedkar was too busy in the political field to keep abreast of on-going research. His sole guide, Prof. Wilson in making the above sweeping, malicious statements is hopelessly outdated. He might not have heard of Aurobindo as a great interpreter of the Veda, but he could have consulted at least some standard works on just histories of Indian Philosophy. Surendranath Dasgupta’s ‘A History of Indian Philosophy’ was available since 1922 and this is what Dasgupta had to say therein⁹ – Looking at advancement of thought in the Rgveda we find first a fabric of thought gradually growing which not only looked upon the universe as a correlation of parts of a construction made of them, but sought to explain it as having emanated from one great being who is sometimes described as one with the universe and surpassing it, and at other times as being separate from it; the agnostic spirit which is the mother of philosophical thought is seen at times to be so bold as to express doubts even on the most fundamental question of creation “who knows whether this world was ever created or not?” (RV.10-129-7). And further : “The self (Atman) is spoken of in one place as the essence of the world, and when we trace the idea in the Brāhmaṇas and the Āraṇyakas we see that Ātman has begun to mean the supreme essence in man as well as in the universe and has thus approached the great Atman doctrine of the Upaniṣads.” Dr. Ambedkar was free to disagree and refute and reject the philosophy of the Rgveda. But his statement that there is no philosophy in it exposes his utter ignorance of the

contents of the R̥gveda. Even Nehru, who had no great love for the Vedas, was constrained, in his sketchy 'Discovery of India', to quote approvingly, the full translation of the Nasadiya Sukta (R̥gveda 10.129) referred to above.

Dr. V.S. Agrawal¹⁰, incidentally, has shown the self-same Sukta to be stating TEN philosophical doctrines as elaborated elsewhere in the R̥gveda itself viz. Sadasad̥vāda, Rajovāda, Vyoma-vāda, Aparā-vāda, Avaraṇa Vāda, Ambhovāda, Amṛtamṛtyu vāda, Ahorātravāda, Dāiva-vāda and Samayavāda. Dr. Ambedkar had not read the most elementary work on Vedic exegesis, 'Ghate's Lectures on R̥gveda' edited by Dr. V.S. Sukhatankar, extant since 1915 which states¹¹: "The avowed purpose of all philosophy is to account for the presence of the world and its contents as something which is not self-evident, and needs to be explained beyond the point of mere individual experience, or analysis through empirical knowledge. The creation hymn performs this act not without some unsteadiness and with petulance due to scepticism. In putting forth a fundamental principle without personality does not fall far behind the best thought of later times inside or outside of India."

And if this is not philosophy, one would like to know what is ?

Nehru and Ambekdar had not studied in depth the question of the Aryan and non-Aryan. The Marxists looked upon Aryans as (i) a race (ii) of immigrant marauders (iii) enslaving the peace loving non-Aryan, autochthonous population of India. Nehru also tows the same line and avers :

i) "We might say that the first great culture synthesis took place between the incoming Aryans and the Dravidians."¹²

ii) Caste began with a hard and fast division between Aryans and non-Aryans, the latter again divided into the Dravidian races and the aboriginal tribes.

iii) "They (i.e. epics) deal with remote periods when the Aryans were still in the process of settling down and consolidating themselves in India."¹³

iv) "Jatakas deal with the period when the final amalgamation of the two principal races of India, the Dravidians and the Aryans was taking place"¹⁴

v) "We have..... developed into a strange mixture of races - Aryan, Dravidian."

So Nehru states, in so many words that Aryan is a term having racial connotation, that Aryans came to India from outside, that they were distinct from Dravidians. The very same Nehru asserts¹⁵: "The word Arya comes from a root meaning to till, and the Aryans as

a whole were agriculturists and agriculture was considered a noble profession." On the next page,¹⁶ Nehru says, "the word Arya ceased to have any racial significance and come to mean noble." This is bad logic and no history. He is of the firm opinion that the 'Aryas' i.e. agriculturists came into India. It is a very well known fact of human nature that 'agriculturists' are the most unwilling groups of people to migrate. Why should 'Aryas' 'the agriculturists' have formed themselves into 'hordes of marauders' and invaded other lands, not only to loot and plunder and then instead of going back home to their fields but decided to settle and enslave a whole indigenous population, is a mystery.

Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts were no less muddled. Let us take the Aryan problem first. Dr. Ambedkar asserts¹⁷: "The difference between Aryans and Non-Aryans was cultural and not racial."¹⁸ Yet in the self-same book he states under the so-called Riddle¹⁸ No.13 and Riddle¹⁹ No.23 that the Aryans were a race of gamblers, that they were a race of drunkards. Many of his much flaunted riddles would have evaporated in the thin air if he had treated mythology as mythology, history as history, race as race, community as community. He chooses to mix what is undoubtedly mythological with what is undoubtedly socio-historical. Numerous examples can be cited. Only one²⁰ is taken up as an illustration here.

Dr. Ambedkar says²¹, "The Devas were a powerful and most licentious community." In a footnote on Page 301 he says: "One does not know what to say of the scholar who first translated the Sanskrit word Deva by the English word God. It was the greatest blunder which has resulted in confusion and has prevented a proper understanding of the social life of the Aryans revealed in the Vedic Literature. That Deva was the name of a community is beyond question. That Rakshasas, Daityas, Danavas are also names of different communities in the same manner as the words Arya and Dasyu are, must also be accepted without question."

Dr. Ambedkar then freely uses the term God to refer to individuals belonging to the Deva community. He speaks of Agni, Indra, Soma, Varuna as Gods. He speaks of their rise, fall and fall into oblivion. God in the Indian context is a personification of some attribute or function which is necessary for the betterment of the human society as a whole. In the Vedic literature and the Purāṇas many men, demons and Rakshasas are stated to have lost their lives in numerous battles fought, but never once have the Devas lost their lives. The Deva is a spiritual entity personified by the sages for identification of their attributes or functions. Indra is a god of rain and is also a ruler in heaven. Varuṇa is the god of waters, Agni that of fire, Vayu that of air and so on. Ambedkar is carried away by his whims, fancies and prejudices and his imagination has run amuck. That he was considered

untouchable has hurt him so much that he allows his reason to be clouded by passion. He tells us that all the Vedas, and the Purāṇas are the works of devils in the form of the Brāhmaṇas whose number never exceeded 1 or 2 percent of the population. He conveniently forgets that it is not the Vedas or the Purāṇas or the Brāhmaṇas who have given sanction to the scheme of untouchability. It is the Bauddhas who are the originators of this pernicious social system, which is a blot, an unpardonable accretion to the fair name of the Vedas and all those who follow these lofty thoughts, the ancient heritage of mankind. I think, it is not fair or healthy to waste one's time to go over what he says about the Devas, when his basic premise that Devas are like any other community of men is utterly incorrect and ridiculous in the extreme.

However, as Dr. Ambedkar has towed the line of the western Indologists and further has a sizeable following even amongst the intellectuals, we give here a glimpse of the utter absurdity of his theory. Dr. Ambedkar is a revered figure here in India. It is, therefore, painful to criticize him. But facts have to be stated and that is what we do here.

According to Dr. Ambedkar²²: "The Devas were a powerful and most licentious community. They even molested the wives of Rishis.... The Devas as a community appear to have established overlordship the Aryan community in very early times." In examining this formulation it is proposed to look into the historicity of Dr. Ambedkar's statement. Let us first collect all the evidence that Dr. Ambedkar cites in support of his theory. He refers to (1) Indra-Ahilyā episode. (2) The mention in the Mahābhārata and Harivamsha of sons born to Indra, Yama, Nāsatyau, Agni, Vayu and other Devas, being "so frequent that one is astounded to note the scale on which such illicit intercourse between the Devas and Aryan women was going on."

Dr. Ambedkar takes for himself the role of an interpreter of history and he is conscious of this role of his. He states in clear terms.²³ A comparison between Vedic Goddesses and Puranic Goddesses cannot be avoided by a student 'whose business is not merely to write history but to interpret history.'

In his Introduction to the Riddles²⁴ he states "There was a time when they (Brahmins) worshipped Vedic Gods. Then came a time when they abandoned their Vedic Gods and started worshipping non-Vedic Gods." If Devas were a mighty community, how could they be worshipped or not worshipped by the sweet will of the conquered community viz. the Aryans? As even a casual student of elementary religion knows, Divinity is felt by man spiritually, but the Deity is the mental construct. India, from the remote past, never believed in religious totalitarianism and hence neither the Vedas nor the Dharmasāstras, neither the epics

nor the Purāṇas insisted on any person not only professing belief in One God but also calling him by the same name. The rise and fall of the Vedic gods only proves the freedom enjoyed in India by human beings approaching their Divinity in whatever form they felt suitable. It only shows that India never believed in nor professed nor practised tyrannical religious hegemony. And this was done fully consciously.

*Ekam sad viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti*²⁵ is not only a fact of contemporary reality for Aucathya Dirghatamas, but a declaration of freedom, for all time to come, to conceive of, to believe in, to worship any god, for he is the manifestation of one Divinity.

It is the innate human freedom that can name the Divinity now Varuṇa, now Indra, now Agni, or Brahma or Viṣṇu or Śiva or Amitābha or Avalokiteśvara or even Santoṣī Mātā. Hindu culture and civilization does not believe in any regimentation, least of all religious. Yes, God is one, but gods can, and should, be many.

Yes, Brahmins, (but, they are a minority in the Hindu society), the Hindus have abandoned the Vedic gods. Dr. Ambedkar asks²⁶ 'where is Indra....' etc. and supplies an answer, "because the worship of Indra, Varuna and Brahma ceased to be profitable." He should have gone into the cause of this. Why did it cease to be profitable? Because great masses of people took to the worship of God in other manifestations, Kṛṣṇa, Ganapati, Rāma, Hanumān or, as Dr. Ambedkar states, even Muslim Pirs. Brahmins followed suit. In India, it is not the priests who 'create' gods, it is the believing mind, the devotion-ful heart of the common man that 'creates' gods, a Brahmin's services may or may not be enlisted. In India, there is no institutionalised religious organization which dictates how a human should approach and commune with divine, it is the simple heart of the common man, that evolves his mode of worship, the services of a priest may or may not be necessary.

In the concluding portion of his Riddle No. 10, Dr. Ambedkar himself states²⁷: "The Greek philosopher Zenophanes insists that - polytheism or plurality of gods is inconceivable and contradictory. That the only true doctrine was monotheism. Considered from a philosophical point of view both are natural. Monotheism is natural where society is a single community; where society is a federation of many communities, polytheism is both natural and inevitable." No abler and simpler justification of Hindu stand-point and weltanschauung can be given to simple-minded masses. Dr. Ambedkar however knows that Hinduism is not polytheism in the accepted sense of the term. Hinduism is cultured catholic, broad-minded acceptance of other man's vision and name of God, who is one. This is supreme Monotheism without monopoly, monotony and inhuman monomania. Yes, Hindu society is a federation of many

Soma and Gandharva are said to enjoy the girl in her childhood, before her puberty.

The verse from Parāshara Grhya Śūtra (1.4.16) is *Somah prathama vivida* Soma obtained her first.

Gandharvo vivida uttarah – Gandharva obtained next.

Triyaste Manuṣyaḥ – Your fourth (husband) is a human-begotten.

Jayarama's commentary on this is : 'Oh Girl, Soma i.e. Candra, your first husband, obtained you on the day of your birth. Candra – remained her husband for two and half years.'

Then Gandharva i.e. Sūrya got her. "Henceforth he was your second husband." Lapse of another equal period, and Agni got her. The three were the guardian angels of a girl, as is obvious. Is any commentary on the learned Doctor's absurd interpretation necessary?

Dr.Ambedkar notes – "The story of how Indra raped Ahalya the wife of Rishi Gautama is well-known." If the Devas had a right over the wives of Aryas, how does Indra's act constitute a rape? According to Dr.Ambedkar, the overlordship of Devas 'had become so degenerated that the Aryan women had to prostitute themselves to satisfy the lust of the Devas.' A prostitute offers her services for a consideration and does so of her free will. If, as Dr.Ambedkar insinuates, the Devas had a right over the wives of Aryans, they were not committing any prostitution, at all. Moreover, Dr.Ambedkar asserts : "The Aryans took pride if his wife was in the keeping of a Deva and was impregnated by him." This is flagrantly unhistorical.

Dr.Ambedkar then refers to *Saptapadi* which he calls *Pradakshana* (and not *Pradakṣiṇa*) and comes to an absurd conclusion. "All this of course is very illuminating and throws a flood of light on the utter subjection of the Aryans to the Devas and moral degradation of Devas as well as of Aryans."

If Dr.Ambedkar had but followed up and read the marriage hymns of the Atharvaveda (14.1; 14.2) in full, he would have discovered the following –

14.1.48 Wherewith Angi grasped the right hand of this earth, therewith grasp I your hand.

14.1.49 (Says the groom) May god Savitr grasp your hand, may king Soma, may Agni, Satavedas.

14.1.51 Bhaga has held your hand, Savitr has held your – hand....

(This is not actual plenary hand-holding attendant with all sexual acts. This all is just symbolic).

- 14.1.53 (Oh auspicious lady) Tvaṣṭṛ fashioned this garment for beauty. (Tvaṣṭṛ was a god or Deva according to Dr. Ambedkar and, therefore, feudal lord to Aryans. Was he acting like a servant to an Aryan woman, weaving a bridal garment for her?) therewith may Savitr and Bhaga (envelope) this woman (so gods, the conquerors were dancing attendance upon a woman of a subjugated community).
- 14.1.59 May king Bhaga go before (i.e. be a harbinger). (The conquering Deva acts like a servant).
- 14.1.60 (The Devas, the hypothecs of Dr. Ambedkar's conception, further degrade themselves). Bhaga fashioned the four feet (of the bridal bed—stead), Bhaga fashioned the four frame—pieces. Tvaṣṭṛ adorned the straps. (If we take Dr. Ambedkar's interpretation, the feudal lords are acting so servilely towards their fiefs.)
- 14.2.9 (The Atharvaveda leaves no doubt that Gandhrvas as well as Apsaras are semi-divine beings). What Gandharvas (there are) and heavenly Apsaras, who stand upon these forest trees, let them be pleasant to this bride..... (Here we find 'Gandharvas' in plural. Dr. Ambedkar would have us believe that The Gandharva had a right over an Aryan woman during her first two and half years. Atharvaveda knows that Gandharvas and Apsaras are the guardian—angels for a bride. And if Gandharva was an actual individual — belonging to the conquering community of Devas, what was he (actually Gandharvas, they) doing sitting on forest trees?

Dr. Ambedkar further states³⁷: "Lawyers know that Saptapadi is the most essential ceremony in a Hindu marriage and that without it there is no marriage at law" and adds: "But very few know why Saptapadi has so great an importance." This is just a turn of expression of Dr. Ambedkar. As a matter of fact none, yes NONE, but Dr. Ambedkar knows the real importance of Saptapadi. Why the real meaning escaped thousands of theologians, sociologists, historians, Indologist, anthropologists, archaeologists before and since Dr. Ambedkar's revelation, is really a mystery, when, according to him, "The reason is quite obvious."³⁸ This quite obvious reason is: "It is a test whether the Deva was satisfied with the Avadāna and was prepared to release her. If the Deva allowed the bridegroom to take the bride away with him upto a distance covered by the Saptapadi it raised an irrebuttable presumption that the Deva was satisfied with the compensation and that his right was extinguished and the girl was free to be the wife of another."³⁹

Dr. Ambedkar precluded the possibility of any other explanation : "The saptapadi cannot have any other meaning." All this is too much for

any sane man to stomach. And what is the compensation for the release by the god? Just a handful of parched grain in fire. Can this be called compensation?

Lot of religion, superstition, occultism, magic, goes into a ritual marriage. A social historian, if he is unable to go to the roots of a custom, should just record it, instead of foisting his preconceived notions on it. Our Grhyaśutrakāras were very catholic and broad-minded in this context. They sanctified local custom and even enjoined that it must be ascertained from old – men and women. There are hundreds of customs in marriage around the world whose interpretation should be undertaken with utmost care.

Among the societies that insisted upon bride price, the girl was considered valuable and the price went to the father and not to any imaginary Deva. Dr. Ambedkar has used the events of Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata to indulge in his perverted interpretations. The selfsame epics record that for securing the hands of Kaikeyi, Gāndhari, Mādri, heavy bride price had to be given to their guardians. There is no mention of any Deva having had a right of prelibation over them. The custom of bride price prevailed even among some sections of Brahmana community.⁴⁰

There is feet-washing as part of marriage rituals, among many peoples in the world.⁴¹ Among Marathas, notes Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,⁴² “on the marriage day married women of the bride’s house pours a dish full of water..... on the – bridegroom’s feet.” Does this imply any sexual right or servility or any such thing, does it not mean plain, simple hospitality? Among Marathas again there is the custom of Sāte, where bride and groom from the same family would be married to a boy and a girl from another family and the practice of feet-washing becomes mutual. These things need to be looked at and studied with clean eyes and clear mind.

Among ancient Poles, the bride on being led to the Church was made to walk three times round a fire, then to sit down and wash her husband’s feet.⁴³ Were Polish women also hypothecated to Fire, from whom redemption had to be sought to marry a human husband?

Rites similar to Saptapadī prevailed among many peoples. “Among Romans, in the celebration of marriage, the bridal pair passed round the family altar while the FLAMEN DIALIS pronounced the sacramental formulae.”⁴⁴ Similar custom prevailed in Scotland and Germany where a procession round the house or the church has to be made either by the cortage of the bride or by the bride and the bridegroom. The same rite is still observed in marriages celebrated in the orthodox Greek church. In ancient Japan, the future couple walked round the central pillar of the house.⁴⁵ “Sometimes”, it is stated⁴⁶ further, “on the last night of December people made three circuits round a field or a house

or a boat, holding a torch or a lighted wisp of straw in their hand, as in the Brahmana ritual." But Dr. Ambedkar's argument can be nipped in the bud through evidence found in the R̥gveda, Atharvaveda, other Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana and the Puranas. Let us trace it back chronologically. In the world-famous Sāvitrī episode of the Mahabharata,⁴⁷ Sāvitrī, when instructed to go back by the God of Death, persists in following him and says: "Wise men who discern the subtle sense declare a person walking seven steps together to be a friend; in the name of that friendship, I shall say something, you will (keeping the sanctity of that friendship in mind, have to) hear it." Yama cannot refuse. Taking seven (originally descriptive not definitive) steps together bound two people in friendship. That was the code of honour, like the Rākhī of later days. Saptapadi has this noble sense and not the vulgar one which Dr. Ambedkar attached to it. In the *Vṛihdrauṇika parvan* of the same *Vanaparvan*, sage Mudgala swears to the Messenger of God by the self same friendship⁴⁸ engendered by walking seven steps together. An allied ritual in the marriage ceremony viz handclasping (*Pānigrahaṇa*) also originates from a hoary friendship-bond-sanctification. In the Kishkindhākāṇḍa of the Rāmātana, when Rāma seeks friendship with Sugrīva, the latter says⁴⁹: "If you like friendship with me, here I extend my arm. Take (my) hand with (your) hand, and make a permanent covenant." Hearing this, Rama pressed his hand, they embraced each other so as their bodies ached (*Paryasvajata pīḍtam*). Then a fire was kindled, Sugrīva and Rāma went round it and thus they bound each other by the bond of friendship (*Vayasyatvam upgātau*).

Coming together of human male and female is a sexual-biological act; when Aryans elevated it to the socio-cultural plane, they looked to the friendship formation ritual as the model. Ideally, therefore, and ideologically, Aryan marriage is an act of friendship-formation. It has no vulgar, abject, degrading, bizarre meaning that Dr. Ambedkar seeks to attach to it.

Going further back to the Brāhmaṇa period we find the sacrificer following the Soma-cow stepping into seven foot-prints of hers⁵⁰ (i.e. of her right fore-foot). In the characteristic manner, the Brāhmaṇas⁵¹ liken this act to the seven-lined Śakvarī metre. The Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa⁵² declares '*sakhāyaḥ saptapadā abhuma*, we have become friends of the seven padas ('pada' being 'step' or 'word'). The section starts with all gods and the sacrificer sitting together. It is the friendship of man and god, of the Arya and Deva through the symbolism and ritual of sacrifice that the Brāhmaṇa celebrates and glorifies. The ritual has no place for the absurd meaning imposed upon it. The sacrificer makes even the Soma cow a friend, declaring 'may I not be severed from your friendship, may you not - break away from my friendship.' Bhāskaraḥṭṭa, the commentator, elaborates, "Oh Soma - you be my

friend, for *sakhā* stands for a person of the same (or similar) learning, as you are *Saptapada* i.e. you have traversed seven steps with me, so by the relationship delimited by (the time to take seven) steps, be you our friend. And we, the *saptapadas*, have become your friends, so now, may I enjoy everlasting friendship by this seven step companionship. May I not fall from your everlasting friendship, and you, too, may not deviate from my friendship"⁵² So, this is the age-old and celebrated custom and practice for striking and sanctifying 'friendship'. Ideally, the husband and wife are the best friends; to solemnise their 'friendship' the practice was transferred from the socio politico-religious sphere to the socio-religio-familial sphere. The meaning ascribed to the act by Dr. Ambedkar has no factual basis at all.

Moreover, the assertion that the Devas were a conquering race and the Vedic Aryans the conquered, and hence there existed feelings of contempt and superiority on the part of the Devas and those of inferiority, humiliation and hatred on the part of the Aryans, also has no basis – whatsoever.

There are scores of places in the Rgveda alone where 'friendship' between Devas and Aryans (people or R̥sis or yajamānas or separate priests) is asserted, invoked, eulogised, taken for granted.

Indra is declared⁵³ to be a friend of the soma-presser, a friend (*sakhā*) to human friends.⁵⁴ Indra is often described as a young⁵⁵ (*yuvā*) friend, a delightful⁵⁶ (*suṣeva*) friend, a generous⁵⁷ friend. Friendship with Indra is also called sweet (*svādu*).⁵⁸ Vedic Aryans are never tired of describing their friendship with Indra. His friendship is ardently sought and cherished⁵⁹ Here are some passages that extol Indra's friendship in one form or the other. "With what grace," interjects one poet, "shall Indra turn towards us?"⁶⁰ Indra, as friend, is the inspirer of singers⁶¹. One poet assures: "He who makes an oblation is your *Sakhā*, Oh Indra."⁶² As an auspicious *Sakhā* Indra grants horses, cows, barley⁶³. Nema Bhargava, requests Indra to stand to his right and be a friend.⁶⁴ Indra's friend is never killed or overpowered⁶⁵ (by the enemies). May we, says a poet, your friends partake of wealth, oh Indra⁶⁶. As your friends, a R̥si requests Indra, may we obtain excellent food⁶⁷. Friends of Indra (the worshippers) rejoice in his abode.⁶⁸ Vasiṣṭhas express desire to be everlasting friends of Indra⁶⁹. R̥sis, Indra's friends, praise him.⁷⁰ The artificers (*Kavayah* i.e. poets) wait upon Indra, being friends.⁷¹ Friends are said to surround Indra with offerings as the heads of families surround a *Vrājapati*.⁷² Indra grants wealth in the name of friendship.⁷³ Indra grants wealth and progeny⁷⁴ to friends and shows them the path of nourishment.⁷⁵ Indra bestows vast fields and wealth upon his friends.⁷⁶ He is the protector of human friends⁷⁷. Indra is entreated to give his strength⁷⁸ and grace and wealth⁷⁹ specifically to human friends (*nṛbhyah sakhibhyah*). Indra is fit to be called (for help) by friends⁸⁰. Indra

favours those who crave for his friendship⁸¹ (*sakhīyatah*), and so a poet supplicates "Indra, be a protector to a friendship-seeker, be a friend to a singer."⁸² Indra is addressed as friend of friends.⁸³ Indra maintains the ancient friendship of the hymners⁸⁴. And the *Angirasas* proclaim that their friendship with Indra is ancient.⁸⁵ Indra's friendship is unbreakable.⁸⁶

The family of *Angirasas* appears to be on specially friendly terms with Indra. Indra is with *Angirasas* as a friend (*Sakhā*) with friends⁸⁷. The *Angirasas* hope "Oh Indra, May we remain your friends."⁸⁸ *Angirasas* are said to be Indra's friends in old days (*pratnāsaḥ*) as now⁸⁹ *Angirasas* declare, "Our friendship with you is ancient"⁹⁰. It is not as if the *Angirasas* sought friendship with Indra⁹¹ as supplicants, but Indra respects them as friends⁹² for he is also eager to keep the ancient friendship of the hymner.⁹³

Not only Indra, the co-called war-lord of Aryans but even Agni was a friend. He is invited to come for forming friendship.⁹⁴ Agni is a dear friend,⁹⁵ like Indra, he is a pleasant (*Suṣeva*) friend⁹⁶. Even though Agni is the least anthropomorphised god, Aryans' fondness for him is emotional. A Whoever accords hospitality to Agni, he becomes a friend to him.⁹⁷ *Angirasas* even go to the extent of identifying themselves with Agni, the friend.⁹⁸ A poet representing the Aryan people sings – "we, the mortal friends, choose you for protection."⁹⁹ There is a friendly entreaty for Agni (the deva) to forgive the lapses of friends (mortals, *martāsaḥ*). Through Agni's friendship mortals that are impure become pure.¹⁰⁰ There is an exhortation to make *Apām Napāt* (a manifestation of Agni) a friend¹⁰¹ who grants wealth to his mortal friends.¹⁰² Both Indra and Agni are together invoked for *sakhya*.¹⁰³ Indra and Agni do approach the rite of the sacrificer who seeks their friendship.¹⁰⁴ A friend's friend is a friend. So Agni, the *sakhin*, is requested to turn his friend, *Varuṇa*, to the mortal friends.¹⁰⁵ And whosoever – friendship Agni chooses prospers,¹⁰⁶ and so it is that "We always desire the *sakhya* of Agni"¹⁰⁷. At one place the *Hotṛ* seeks Agni's friendship for the sacrificers.¹⁰⁸ So the poet can request Agni to be pleased at the *Sakhya*¹⁰⁹ (of the mortal) after recognising it.¹¹⁰ Agni is a good friend (*susakhā*) for a sacrificer who seeks his friendship¹¹¹ (*sakhīyate*.) Agni is the best friend of *Kanvas* for *Kanvas* are his friends¹¹² (*Kanvasakhah*). He is the friend of priests and sacrificers¹¹³. No wonder then that Agni is implored to come for friendship¹¹⁴. On the term *Mitra*, the *Rgvedic* poets play for double entendre. So a poet declares, 'Agni, you are a dear friend (*priyaḥ mitraḥ*), so a praiseworthy friend (*īdyaḥ Sakhā*) to human friends.'¹¹⁵

Likewise is *Soma* also a friend.¹¹⁶ "A man who possesses a friend like you (*tvāvat*), Oh *Soma*, perishes not."¹¹⁷ There are scores of passages which extol friendship between the sage and *Soma*. Its juice is the

most exhilarating one.

Pūṣan the deity which presides over securing succour to the worshipper is a friend of all hymners.¹¹⁸ It is likened to a Rūdra who also renders assistance to all the members of the society.

Varuṇa of the Rgveda is a formidable God and yet Vasiṣṭha does not hesitate to call him a friend¹¹⁹ and asks 'what was my offence that you seek to strike a friend?'¹²⁰ Indra and Varuṇa together are prayed for the grant of wealth.¹²¹

Not only these but also Brahaspati¹²² Vāta¹²³ Saraswati,¹²⁴ Viś akarmaṇi,¹²⁵ Viṣṇu¹²⁶ Savitr¹²⁷ (whose friendship all mortals seek), Rudra¹²⁸ (for whose friendship they sacrifice), Aṣvins¹²⁹, Vāstospati¹³⁰ are described as friends.

Even in the Atharvaveda, Indra,¹³¹ Bhaga,¹³² Savitr¹³³, Varuṇa¹³⁴ and Agni¹³⁵ are the friends of mortals. Varuṇa is expressly mentioned as *Saptapadaḥ sakhā*, a friend who has walked seven steps together with Atharvan. Agni is implored to protect humans as friend does a friend (*sakha sakhāyam, amrtān amrtyaḥ*). This and the Rgveda 1.89.2 give a complete lie to Dr. Ambedkar's queer theory about the Deva-Aryan relationship. The Rgveda passage refers to the auspicious (*bhadra*) goodwill of Devas, the friendship (*rāti*) of the Devas, comradeship (*sakhyam*) of Devas. The ritual, devotional, spiritual comradeship between the deity and the devotee, the Devas and Vedic (Aryan) people, is patent enough. Dr. Ambedkar should not have brought it down to any mundane, historical, actual plane, giving an absurd meaning to the ritual of *Saptapadī*. This exercise in establishing the obvious was necessitated by Dr. Ambedkar's attempt at obliterating the obvious, with such vehemence as "The saptapadī cannot have any other meaning." The Yajurveda has spelt out for us the relationship between man and wife, "wife is the friend of all."¹³⁶ Whatever social custom prevailed in making the bonds of friendship unbreakable were transferred, in hoary antiquity, when sanctification of the marital bond, rising above the sexual-biological level to the religio-social became necessary, whether introduced by *Śvetaketu* or not. The Mahābhārata declares, "Wife is the friend of one who stays in a house (i.e. a householder)"¹³⁷ "Wife is a friend given by destiny,"¹³⁸ "Wife is the most best (double-superlative) friend"¹³⁹ "These sweet-speaking (wives) become (men's) friends in seclusion"¹⁴⁰ Devayani implores Yayati "Be my friend and husband"¹⁴¹ The Mahabharata declares the marital bond "to have been made an everlasting and unchangeable friendship"¹⁴² and places it alongside of friendship as well¹⁴³ "A friend" says the Mahabharata, "they declare to be seven paced"¹⁴⁴ "Good people of exalted families call a friend of the good to be seven paced."¹⁴⁵ Savitri nails Yama down with - "Wise people who discern the essence of the matter call him a friend (who walks) seven steps (together)."

Scores of passages can be cited from later Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas Puranas and belles letters in Sanskrit showing that walking (seven steps) together was an act of friendship first, later adopted in the marriage ritual. Even the Buddhist canon which has so little to say on mundane matters uses *saddhim cara* (together-walker) as a synonym of a friend. The *pacceka sambudda*, should he come by a learned (*nipāka*) companion (*sahāya*), is exhorted to go with him (*careyya*), walk, sit, stand, lie down with (*iriyayya*) him¹⁴⁶. The Kalakāṇṇi – jāta¹⁴⁷ clinches the issue by giving the age-old definition of friendship and as is the practice of Pali canon elaborates upon the theme, "Friend, indeed, (one) becomes by seven steps, a companion by twelve, ..." etc The Buddhist canon knows nothing of such an absurd interpretation put on an age-old custom, just to malign those Dr. Ambedkar terms as Aryans'.

Another misconception of Dr. Ambedkar is about Soma. He calls Ancient Aryans 'a race of drunkards'¹⁴⁸ and elaborates this theme in such expressions as "The Vedic Gods drank wine. The divine wine was called Soma." "There were so many soma sacrifices that there were hardly any days when Soma was not drunk,"¹⁴⁹ and so on. Dr. Ambedkar, in substantiating his interpretation, quotes, saying, "The R̥gveda says : Worshipping the sun before drinking madira (wine)."¹⁵⁰ He, however, omits to locate the R̥gvedic passage.

We have attached a note on Soma plant at the end. The passage is RV1.166.7. There is no need to enter into an elaborate exercise of Vedic exegesis. The operative part is: "They worship for drinking the delightful drink." Dr. Ambedkar retains the word *Madira* and since he uses no transliteration, a person not well-versed in the R̥gveda is led to believe and read it to be *Madirā*, for such a false clue is given by him by translating the word in English as wine. The R̥gveda does not know the word *Madirā*, (feminine noun). It only uses *Madira* as adjective meaning 'delighting, exhilarating,' It is an adjective of Soma, Madhu, Amrit, Andhas, Indu, Anisa, the shoot of Soma and Andhas the whole plant. Madhu is honey and Indu, Soma-drop. The original Soma plant was already rare in the R̥gvedic times. Soma-pressing, after pounding, was part of the daily ritual – performed thrice by the Vedics, twice by the Avestans. As soon as pounded and pressed, it was passed through a sieve. Immediately it was offered unmixed to Indra or Vāyu. It was sometimes mixed with milk, curds, grain or honey. All that Macdonell and Keith¹⁵¹ say about the effects of Soma is its exhilarating quality. They do not use the expressions 'intoxicating' or 'inebriating'. Furthermore, according to them : "It is difficult to say that Soma was ever a popular, as opposed to a hieratic drink." After setting forth the views of philologists, Vedics, naturalists of the nineteenth century, Hillebrandt has endorsed the view that Soma was not cannabis (*bhang*). Furthermore, Hillebrandt has stated the most obvious fact :

"Among the innumerable hymns which invite the gods to Soma drink, there are very few which are of a popular character."¹⁵² Actually Hillebrandt could identify only one R̥gvedic hymn (8.69) as evidence of its popular character and there too only three out of eighteen verses show that popular character. Hillebrandt has noted that these verses differ considerably from the others in content. "In these verses music and song join together in honour of the great god (i.e. Indra) and children have their share in the joyous festival."¹⁵³ Otherwise pressing and drinking Soma was a very solemn and serious affair. Soma had already become scarce in the R̥gvedic time and the Śrauta sūtras had started prescribing substitutes. "R̥gveda", as Hillebrandt remarks, "already anticipates the injunctions of the law books according which only those who possess provisions for three or more years are entitled to drink Soma."¹⁵⁴ One may not agree with Hillebrandt's postulation of the evolution of a Soma-Aristocracy, but the fact must be acknowledged that Soma was not a drink of riff-raff durnkards; for them was Surā.

The R̥gvedic derivatives from the root 'Mad', viz Mada, Madin, Madintama, Madira, Madiṣṭha all mean 'rejoicing' or its equivalents. Basham¹⁵⁵ has remarked: "The drink prepared from the plant could – scarcely have been alcoholic, for it was made with great ceremony in the course of the sacrifice, when the herb was pressed between stones, mixed with milk and drunk on the same day. Sugar and honey, which produce fermentation, were not usually mixed with it and the brief period between its brewing and consumption cannot have been long enough for the generation of alcohol in appreciable quantity." In a very elaborate survey of the Vedic religion, Louis Renou¹⁵⁶ has – this to say, "conferring immortality, it is amṛta itself....the remedy par excellence which stimulates the flow of words, produces a sort of ecstasy and confers all the delights." He does not refer to intoxication in this context and where he does, he takes care to call it mystical intoxication, which a Kabir or Meera or Tukaram experienced, without the help of any Soma. The R̥gveda¹⁵⁷ – speaks of Soma as svadu and sumedhas, sweet and impeller of good thoughts. Alcoholic intoxication is not known to impel any good thoughts. Another R̥gvedic passage says that when drunk Soma becomes Aditi and secures removal of goldly anger. Alcoholic intoxication hardly fits this description.¹⁵⁸ In the self-same hymn (verse.4) the poet prays: "Be a giver of well being to our heart when drunk, like a father to a son, friend to a friend, Oh, giver of long life." Dr. Ambedkar's drunkards would not answer to these descriptions. Soma furthered filial love and devotion and confidence, it promoted friendly feeling and had a healing quality. (V.5) states that when drunk, Soma strengthens the legaments of joints. a drunkard walks as if the legaments of his joints are loosened. "Soma gives puṣṭi (nourishment) and far sight (V.6), Soma is the lengthener of life (V.7), he is the protector (V.9), he is soft-hearted (V.10).

Description of Soma in V.11 is note-worthy: "He drives away drowsiness and proclivity to talk," the exact opposites of any alcoholic beverage. Soma was an invigorating drink and not a depressant like liquor. Dr. Ambedkar's preposterous suggestion has no basis at all. In the Rgveda Madhu (sweet) is not only an objective qualifying Soma or milk, it often is a noun denoting Soma or milk, as noted in the Vedic Index¹⁵⁹. What common properties could Soma and milk have had? Certainly not intoxication. Dr. Ambedkar, perhaps, did not have time to go into such depth in Vedic scholarship. But then, he should not have indulged in the sweeping generalizations like the one under discussion.

Undoubtedly alcoholic and intoxicating drink of the Vedic times was Surā. It occurs only five times in the Rgveda. One is a pure myth connected with Aśvins. They as physicians give hundred pitchers of Sura.¹⁶¹ At RV1.191.10 there is a reference to the leather bag in the house of one who possesses Surā. These two passages are neutral as to the properties of Surā. At one place Surā is spoken of as a prize¹⁶¹: "Literally donors win a deep potation of Sura." At 8.2.12 the effect of Sura is called Durmada (evil intoxication) and at 7.86.6 Surā occurs in the enumeration of vices—'Wine, anger, dice and thoughtlessness.'

Deprecation of drinking surā in Vedic and later literature is overwhelming, praise of surā is very faintly and infrequently heard. 'Soma is Glory, evil are the surā vessels.'¹⁶² "Soma is truth, prosperity, light; surā is untruth, misery, darkness."¹⁶³ As early as in the times of the Yajurveda,¹⁶⁴ Brahmins had given up drinking. "So a Brāhmaṇa drinks not surā thinking, 'lest I be affected by sin.'" The description of the Sautramani sacrifice makes it absolutely clear that, though a ritual in it required that a Brāhmaṇa consume the dregs of Surā, such a Brāhmaṇa was hard to find, and there is an express injunction that if such a one is not available, the dregs may be poured on an ant hill.¹⁶⁵ The Yajurveda states¹⁶⁶ — "This (i.e. Surā) is for a Kṣatriya, one should not say to a Brāhmaṇa that surā, if drunk by a Kṣatriya, does not harm the latter". After quoting this passage, Dr. P. V. Kane¹⁶⁷ avers "...at the time of the Kāthaka saṃhitā public opinion had come to this stage that Brāhmaṇas had generally given up drinking surā. Aṣvapati Kaikaya of the Chandogya Upaniṣat¹⁶⁸ fame declares to the assembly of the Brahmanaṣ, inter alia, that there is no *surapa* (liquor-drinker) in his kingdom. Much maligned Manu condemns liquor in no uncertain terms¹⁶⁹ — "surā is the fifth of foods, and filth indeed, is sin, therefore a Brāhmaṇa, a Kṣatriya, a Vaiśya should not drink surā." "Sura may be known as of three kinds, made from molasses, flour and from Madhuka tree. Brāhmīns should not drink any of these."¹⁷⁰

Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Sūtras, Smṛtis of Manu and Yajñavalkya, Kauṭilya, Śāṅkara — all have condemned drinking of liquor and yet Dr. Ambedkar

says that Aryans were a race of drunkards. The Para Tasna portion of Avesta also deals with the exact equivalent of Soma ritual, it being Haoma there. In the Avestan ritual Haoma stands for wisdom, the very opposite of a drunken state. There is no need to labour the point any more. Suffice it, here, to say that Dr. Ambedkar should not have indulged in such sweeping, baseless, disparaging statements.

Dr. Ambedkar is a great social and political leader of the Indians. We have respect for him. We had to take note of his views for they are incorrect and born out of his prejudices for he was treated as an 'untouchable' by Hindu society. His views are likely to mislead many, for Doctor's writing are informed by deep scholarship.

Note on Soma Plant :

(Select writings of Dr. H. R. Diwekar -1976 Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Pune 4-pb.27-31)

From the various references in Rgveda, Soma (juice from the plant of the same name) was used as a libation at sacrifice. Its stem was not round, but angular; at every joint, it had tendrils which pierced the ground and held it firm. Its off-shoots had a reddish colour, when they were tender, but as they hardened they became green and in the end had a brownish hue. When pressed, they give out a juice which when fresh had a sweet smell and taste. These stems were collected in early morning and the juice was stored and mixed with milk, curds, ghee and offered as libation to the fire. It was also drunk fresh, during the sacrifice.

It is called '*Maujavaya*' i.e. the plant grew on the mountain by name *Mujavata*. This plant had lost its identity even in Mahabharata days. We also do not know the location of this *Mujavata* mountain. We come across this word in Yajurveda. Four subsidiary sacrifices are before the main Rajasuya sacrifice takes place. One of them is *Shakamedha* - offering of some vegetable oblation to God Tryambaka to whom prayer is offered to enable the priest to go to the other side of the mountain *Mujavata*. This shows that this mountain was far away from the sacrificial place and was unknown to the priest. Moreover, the connection of Soma and *Mujavata* also appears to have been lost, for in this subsidiary sacrifice Soma is not mentioned. Instead Shaka vegetable is mentioned.

Mujavata means '*having muja*'. But the word '*muja*' is not found in Sanskrit dictionary. *Muja* is said to be '*Munja*'. But this equation is incorrect. *Muja* is a kind of grass and it is found in plenty everywhere. Moreover, *Munja* is not having any connection with a mountain.

Dr. Diwekar had come across an ancient Mongolian word '*Mujatah*'. '*Munja*' is snow and '*tagh*' is mountain. It is thus Himavat mountain. The Vedics when they were living near this *Mujavat* peak of the Himalayas,

they came across this mountain and the Soma plant grown on it.

Dr. Divekar states that Mujatagh is situated by the other side of Hindukush at the extremity of the Himalayan ranges.

The Vedics had lost contact with this region in pre-Mahabharata days. The Zoroastrians also had moved away from these regions and so had lost touch with this plant.

Soma was also called Indu, because of its cooling and pleasurable effect when drunk. The mountain Hindukush is Indukush on one of the peaks of which this Soma plant was grown. Or the Mujavata mountain may have become Indukush because of its association with Soma or Indu. Indukush became Hindukush – the mountain of the Indu – Hindu people.

PART – III

RĀMĀYAṆA

I

Introductory

**What is Rāmāyaṇa?**

It is the historical biography of Rama, the son of Daśaratha the King of Kosala, with his capital at Ayodhyā – now a famous pilgrim centre in the State of Uttara Pradesh of modern India. This ancient city is on the banks of the river Śarayū.

Under the British influence, a fashion has been established amongst the educated elite of India that the events described in the Epics Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are just mythological stories invented by the imagination of the gifted sages like Valmiki and Vyasa.

In Mahābhārata the sage Kṛṣṇadwaipāyana Vyāsa in clear terms declares that this is the history under the title जयो नाम इतिहासो अयम्। (JAYO NĀMA ITIHĀSŌ AYAM). Similarly the story of Rāmāyaṇa begins with the conversation between the sage poet Valmiki and another sage, Narada ever on the move. When they met at the former's Ashrama – Cottage – on the banks of the river Tamasā, Valmiki enquired of the ever-itinerant sage Narada : “Oh all-knowing one! Who is at present the most famous hero with all the manly qualities namely integrity, bravery, righteousness, gratitude, truthfulness, dedication to one's principles, unblemished, character, concern for all living creatures, learning, skill, beauty, a pleasing appearance, courage, radiance, ability to keep under control his anger perfect control over his senses, lack of jealousy at all times, an undaunted heroism which can frighten even the celestials ? In reply the sage told him: “Oh poet ! he is Rama of the Solar Ikshwaku dynasty, at present ruling at Ayodhya” Then he narrated to him the details of the life of this mighty and ideal King, the many-sided personality. We shall quote here one verse delineating Rama's superhuman qualities –

“धर्मज्ञः सत्यसंधश्च प्रजानां च हिते रतः ।

यशस्वी ज्ञानसंपन्नः शुचिर्विशयः समाधिमान् ॥१-१-१२

*Dharmajñaḥ satyasandhaśca prajānām ca hite rataḥ,
yaśasvī jñānasampannaḥ śucirvaśyaḥ samādhimān*”

The unique character of the epic :

The poet was so much impressed by the narration that he could not but think of Rama and Rama alone. In this mood, he went to have his bath in the river and perform his morning ablutions. After

performing the ritual, he became fascinated by the bewitching beauty of the forest around and moved along observing the play of the many-splendoured nature. While he was thus absorbed in watching the dance of the trees and listening to the melody of the twittering of the birds' songs, he heard a piteous wail of the Krauncha bird, engaged in the sport of love with its mate. The poet's heart moved and he gave vent to his anguish in the words, which now form part of that immortal couplet :

“मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः ।

यत्क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकमवधीः काममोहितम् ॥

Mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvam agamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ

YatKraucha mithunādekamavadhīḥ kāmamohitam ॥ (1-2-15)

– Oh hunter! as you have killed one of the love-intoxicated krauncha birds, you will wander homeless till eternity” The poet when he saw the birds struggling for life in the pool of blood, expressed his deep sorrow in these beautiful words. Once he got his muse, he could not remain silent. He was all the while pondering over the thought about the King Rama, so he felt that he has been ordained by the Lord Himself to write the history of this ideal and great King of Ancient India. He felt that this history as well as biography of Rama would constantly remain in the hearts of men all over the world till its end. He asserts in confident notes thus :

“यावत्स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले

तावद् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

Yāvātsthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaḥ ca mahītale

tāvad Rāmāyaṇakathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati ॥ (1.2.36, 37)

– “As long as the mountains stand and rivers flow here on this earth, so long shall this history of Rama be cherished by men all over the world”.

And that this was not a mere boast of Valmiki is proved by the fact that this story has caught the imagination of men ever since it was first sung by him.

Its world-wide impact :

P.N. Oak in his *Magnum opus* – World Vedic Heritage – states that ‘Rome’, the capital city of Italy in Europe, is named after ‘Rama’ the hero of Ramayana. The European historians believe that there are some past reports which state that Remus and Romulus, the two brothers founded Roma. But the very names of these brothers give out the truth that this city was named after Rama. In India Rama is also Ramulus (in Andhra Pradesh). The Romans had adopted the Indian custom of burning the dead from the Greeks who in turn were following their old Vedic practice (*Cremandi vel comburendi*). This custom was afterwards gradually dropped upon the introduction of Christianity. Fanny Parks notes in her book : “The Romans worshipped their founder

Romulus as a God, under the name of Quirinus ... they were invoked with prayers" (Ibid - P.432). Quirinus appeared to be a corrupt form of Lord Krishna. We have pointed out in our First Volume that Vedic sphere of influence extended all over the whole of the then known world. The Greeks were the followers of the Vedas then. And from the Greek, the Vedic influence spread towards other European countries in the west. Before the advent of the semitic faiths on the scene, the cult of Mithraism was prevalent all over Europe. Mitra is the Vedic name for Sun God. This unmistakably shows Europe's link with the Vedic mode of worship. So Rama and Krishna also appear to be the ancestral Gods of the Greeks and the Romans.

That Rome is named after Rama is proved more convincingly by the fact that another city on the Adriatic coast diagonally opposite to Roma is named after Rama's rival Ravana. About this, Pococke observes : "Behold the memory of Ravana still preserved in the city of Ravanna and see the Western coast, its great rival Rama or Roma."²

Again the oldest form is not 'Romani' but 'Romnes' (Roma).³

P.N.Oak in his book on P-804, gives a picture of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana painted inside ancient homes discovered in archaeological excavations in Italy (see the picture at the end).

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are seen here walking in single file - exactly as described in the Ramayana - in the forest. Sita carries in her hand the Tulsi Manjari - seed bearing twig of the sacred Bastil plant.

There are many more such pictures in Oak's book. These can be referred to with profit.

Rama has been regarded as an ideal King and so the Pharaoh's of ancient Egypt styled themselves as Rama I or Ramesis I, Ramesis II etc.

In 251 A.D. Ramayana was translated in Chinase by Kong-Sung-Vee. This is the first translation available in a foreign language. Since then it has been translated in almosts all the languages of the World.

School texts require correction :

With the publication of our First Volume, many controversies and misconceptions about Indian Chronology should now set at rest. It has been conclusively proved therein that 3139-38 B.C. is the date of Bharata-war and it is the sheet-anchor of Indian Chronology.

With this the school texts require to be corrected. The currently held view that until about 8000 B.C. the man lived by hunting and gathering food from forests requires to be discarded. It is true that we have not much historical data prior to about 10000 B.C. the end of the millenium after the last glacial epoch. The Puranas point to about 31000 years before present as the period from which the present

white boar epoch started (see our Vol.II). Yet from the daily Sankalpah (resolution to start the day with prayer) recited in India, we know that this universe has no beginning and no end, and the present era started much earlier than 197 crores of years before the present. The evolutionists maintain that anatomically modern man appeared at about 100000 years ago. But as we have shown in our Vol.I (P-72) of this series, the archaeological evidence supports the contention about the existence of modern man millions of years ago. The modern scientific theories of creation of the universe like 'big bang' 'steady-state' etc. are in themselves very speculative. And if one speculation is to be substituted by the other, the Vedic model is much more logical than the so-called scientific non-spiritual model.

The Vedic model holds the key to fathom the secret of the origin of the universe. This secret cannot be unravelled by the deeper and thorough-going analysis of the matter even at the micro-level. The stumbling block for these analysts is the 'Problem of consciousness'. They should note that man is not a mechanical device which can be analysed in the minutest details in a physical laboratory. They may perhaps agree and bounce back with their star question -

"Well! Well! I agree. But, oh Vedantin! you state that once the Brahman has set in motion this universe with certain fixed laws. He does not interfere with its working. That act he has performed billions and trillions of years ago. What is his relevance today, to you or to me or to somebody else?"

The simple answer is : He is relevant to every moment of our life. As the Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle' shows though the Brahman ordinarily does not interfere with the day-to-day working of this universe, He has reserved to Himself certain power to act in a particular situation forcefully. He gives hints to men seeking him. He has stated in unequivocal terms in His Bhagavadgita :

“यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata ।

abhyutthānam adharmasya tadāātmānam sṛjāmi aham ॥

- Whenever and wherever there is decline in ethical practice. (large scale unwillingness to follow the righteous code of conduct), and predominant increase in the tendency to follow unethical practices (i.e. adopt demonic way to life), at that time I descend to set in motion the righteous way of life again."

From time to time we find around the growth of evil, but somebody at the risk of his own life and comfort, comes forward and clears the path for the good to show his appearance. This is the experience of every observant individual. This is the lesson of history too.

God has given intellect to man to know his real nature. He has also shown the way by revealing this truth to the sages and the seers. These realised souls suffer for the good of the mankind and keep the God's purpose alive. His purpose is clear and unequivocal. As the *Upanishads* have put it, it is to enable everybody to realise his true nature and enjoy limitless and profound happiness. The way to realisation is through spiritual practices (*Yoga-sadhana*). The *Yogasutras* give man an astounding promise. It says : "हेयं दुःखमनागतम्। *Heyam duhkhamanāgatam* (2-16). The misery that has not yet taken shape can be averted." The King Rama shows the way. Whenever the tendency towards evil is unmanageable, the Lord Himself incarnates, as Rama did. He came and killed that evil genius Ravana and saved the righteous from his evil rule.

Historicity of Rama : King Rama was a such a phenomenon! He was all too human, yet at the same time had superhuman tendencies to correct the mal-functioning of the society around. His is a historical personality.

In the Vol.I of this series (p-311) "we have shown that the chronicle or the list of the names of Kings given on a tablet unearthed near Kish a ancient Sumerian capital city, shows : "In Ukhu city Ukusi became King and reigned for 36 years." Waddell the British Epigraphist identifies 'Ukusi' as Ikshvaku of the first Indian Solar Dynasty. The date of Ikshvaku according to this chronicle is 3378 B.C. + 4942 (Waddell arbitrarily fixes the date of Ikshvaku at 3378 to suit his theory that the Bharata war was actually fought in 670 B.C.) = 8320 B.C. According to the Dynastic list given in *Jnanakosha*⁴ Rama is 64th from Ikshvaku. In 'Ancient world'⁵ - p.148, Rama is stated to be the 71st in line from Ikshvaku. His date is determined on astronomical data at 10th January 4439 B.C. or Mesha Shukla 9th (currently vernal Equinox falls in April, then it was in January). In view of Rama's place in the line of Ikshvaku being 64th or 71st, this date 4439 B.C. as the date of Rama appears to be reasonable. From Puranic point of view Rama's date would be around the same years.

Even though *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* the two very large and famous epics of India contain much mythological material, yet it is generally agreed that these epics contain many historical facts. The most important historical fact is : *Rama was a historical person.*

Valmiki's conception of history : And *Ramayana* is a historical narrative. It is wrong to suppose that history is a mere collection of accounts of battles fought and won by a King. As stated in *Ramayana* itself : "The two sons of Rama, Kusha and Lava, versed in the knowledge of righteous conduct as preached in the Vedas, sung this biography of Rama and Sita to convey to the posterity the essence of the teachings

of the Vedas''(2-6,7). These persons with superhuman qualities were the very embodiments of the teachings of the Vedas. We have discussed in detail and shown that the Indians had the sense of history.⁷ Because of this alone, they had preserved the genealogical lists of the kings and great men who had played a very significant role in the advancement of social well-being. This way the role played by the sages and seers and such other great souls has also been preserved in greater detail. The records of religious, social and philosophical developments are also available. The organisation of the Government and the society with the principles governing them have been described in detail in our Itihasas like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Puranas are encyclopaedic in nature and the different stories and episodes narrated in these as well as in the Itihasas, are for the benefit of all the members of the society. In the form of enlivening stories, the truth behind a particular principle is symbolically brought home to an average member of the society.

The detailed records of the events in particular regions under a particular king were also kept by the officers of the king. As we have noted in our first volume every King had in his employ three officers namely Suta – the *Court Chronicler*, the Magadha – *The Private Secretary of the king*, whose duty it was to record the king's activities. He was a personal biographer. There was yet third officer, the *Charana* – the personal friend whose main function was to boost the sagging spirits of the King. As we all know, uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. The King being the head and the Chief executive of the State has multifarious problems to face and solve. He cannot allow himself to be cowed down by these. He has to keep cool even under the most provocative circumstances. To enable him to do this the Charana, the personal friend, keeps up the spirits of the King.

It would thus be seen that the ancients had not only the sense of history but had the proper perspective of writing history and maintaining the court records. We get from these Itihasas and the Puranas, the true history of India in proper perspective.

It is really unscientific to rely merely on archaeological or epigraphical data so far unearthed, or on the accounts of the foreign travellers or on some stray notes in the histories of other nations. These are important source materials. But at the same time these are inadequate aids in writing ancient Indian history. They can be used as supplementary material over and above the written records available in India in the form of the Vedic literature and the Itihasas and the Puranas. The tendency of the modern scholar is the other way round. The dictum is : put primary faith in the ancient ruins, and the decipherment of writings on stones, clay bricks the papyrus rolls and the study of ancient coins in preference to the readily available literary data. They know

that the former evidence cannot be studied in isolation of the latter. The vedic and other available literature is adequate to construct the reliable history of Ancient India, atleast from the date of the Bharata war i.e. from 3139-38 B.C. We have from these records the real picture of our forefathers as they lived and moved, made wars or peace, particularly their thought processes and the conclusions reached through these show how highly developed and civilized our ancients were. The ephemeral achievements of the kings and rulers are played down. But the achievements of the different social groups are presented in proper perspective. Man's mental development, and the highest stage it can reach, is presented in the form of detailed biographies of Rama and Krishna. In Mahabharata and later literature, we have detailed discourses on social organisation and Governmental administration as well as on the modes of worship a man should follow so as to realise his goal in life, namely to know his real nature, his divinity. This way the Vedas and the other ancient Indian literature really represent the cultural History of the whole of Mankind from the beginnings of its life, on the mother earth.

Besides the fact that the detailed history of particular rulers of particular regions was available in their respective court records, there was yet another reason, why these were not incorporated in the Puranas and the Itihasas. Vishnu Purana notes :

“कथमेव नरेन्द्राणां मोहो बुद्धिमतामपि।

येन फेनसधर्माणो अप्यतिविश्वस्तचेतसः॥

Katham eva narendrāṇāṃ moho buddhimatāmapi

yen phenasadharmāṇo apyativīśvastacetasaḥ॥

– How infatuated these kings—even the intelligent ones—have become with the idea that they are the permanent masters of this earth, forgetting that their stay here is momentary, like the foam or the bubbles on water.” The Puranas have therefore become selective in their approach in noting down in detail the exploits of each and every King.

However they assert that the chronological, genealogical and other details noted by them are authentic. Vishnu Purana – 4-24-149 avers :

“भगीरथाद्याः सगरः ककुत्स्थो दशाननो राघवलक्ष्मणौ।

युधिष्ठिराद्याः च बभुवुरेते सत्यं न मिथ्या क्व नु ते न विद्मः॥

Bhagīrathādyāḥ sagaraḥ kakutstho dasānāno rāghavalakshmaṇau

Yudhiṣṭhirādyāḥ ca babhuvurete satyaṃ na mithyā kvanu te na vidmaḥ॥

There is not an iota of doubt that Bhagiratha, Sagara, Kakutstha, Ravana, Rama, Lakshmana, Yudhisthira etc. all these did once exist. What happened to them afterwards, (in after life) who knows?”

The authenticity of the Puranas and Itihasas cannot, therefore, be

a matter of dispute. They are the source materials of our history. But these are ridiculed and rejected as unworthy of any serious attention, by the majority of the Western Indologists and their camp followers in India.

Buddhist Chronicles are not reliable :

The Buddhist chronicles as source materials of history are totally unreliable. We have shown this convincingly in Vol.I of this series, while dealing with Ashoka Maurya's inscriptions (Please refer to pages 362 & 367 of that volume).

Similar is the position of the Buddhist Jatakas vis-a-vis Ramayana. Ashvaghosha, the biographer of Buddha, mentions Valmiki as the author of the history of Rama (Ramayana). He states :

“वाल्मीकिभिरादैः विससर्ज पद्यं कर्तुं न शक्नोत् च्यवनो महर्षिः ।

Vālmikibhirādaiḥ visasarja padyam kartum na śaknot cyavano maharṣiḥ

– What the great sage Chyavana could not do, his descendant Valmiki could accomplish by composing Ramayana in Anushtubh metre through his inspiration”. Again in his poem ‘Soundarananda’ Ashvaghosha states :

स तेषां गौतमश्चक्रे स्ववंशसदृशी क्रियाः ।

कण्वः शकुंतलस्येव भरतस्य तपस्विनः ।

वाल्मीकिरिव धीमांश्च धीमतो मेघिलेययोः ॥

“*Sa teṣām goutamaḥ cakre svavamśasadr̥śī kriyāḥ*

Kaṇvah śakuntalsyeva bharatasya tapasvinah

Valmikiriva dhīmān ca dhīmato maithileyayoh ॥

– The sage Gautama performed all the sacramental rituals (samskaras) on Siddhartha (who later on became Buddha) and others as were current in the Shakya family. Just as the sage Kanva had done on that brave and ascetic type Bharata the son of Shankutala or as Valmiki had done on the brilliant sons of Sita – the Maithili princess.” Ashvaghosha a prominent Buddhist must be in the know of the Buddhist literature about Rama. In the Dasharatha – Jataka, the Buddhist chronicle, Rama is shown a learned scholar and not as a brave warrior. Further Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are shown as the children born of the same mother. This mother died soon after the birth of these children. Then their father married another queen who commanded Dasharatha to crown her son Bharata as the heir apparent. The king refused, but being afraid that his queen may poison his other three children sent them to a safe place in the Himalayas. Twelve years after their departure the King died. Rama along with this brother and sister returned to the capital and crowned himself as King. He then married his sister Sita. He ruled wisely.

Ashvaghosha does not believe in such a story of Rama as given in the *Dasharatha-Jataka*. He follows Valmiki. There is yet another story of Rama in *Jayadissa-Jataka*. In this story the prince to save

his father's life, offers himself as food to some *Yaksha* – a divine being. The Queen prays God for the safe return of her son. She says : "When Rama had been to Dandaka forest this mother had offered her prayers to God for his safe return oh, my son! I do the same now."

In yet another Buddhist story 'Vessantara', Bodhisatva is named Vessantara the Prince. The Gods had given him a white elephant as a gift. Wherever this elephant went there occurred famine. The people, therefore, approached the King to banish his prince Vessantara from the Kingdom. The King bowing down to the wishes of his subjects bade the Prince to go to Bunk, a mountain in the Himalayas, with his two sons. His wife Maddi has a long dialogue with her husband Vessantara like Sita with Rama in Ramayana before proceeding to lead a forest life. Ultimately she implores her husband to allow her to accompany him in these words : "I am the wife of the prince who is banished for life to stay on Bunk. I shall be faithful to him, as Sita was to Rama" (Gatha 2196).

All these references clearly show that the Buddhist chroniclers have used some of the incidents in Valmiki's Ramayana and woven their fanciful stories around these. That the source of all these strange perversions in the Buddhist works is Valmiki's Ramayana is clear from the fact that no one story from some Buddhist work tallies with the other. But Valmiki's story is self-consistent and it is the source of different Ramaysna stories in different languages such as Kamba Ramayana in Tamil or Tulsi Ramacharitanamasa in Hindi, or its version in Marathi. There are some 16 standard works on Ramayana, besides the three noted above. Others are :

- Adhyatma, Bhushundi, Ramopakhyana and Ananda Ramayana in Sanskrit.
- Kashmiri Prakasharama Kuryagrami (authors not known) in Dogari Language.
- Krittivasa's of the same name in Bengali.
- Giradhara of Girdharadasa in Gujarati.
- Torave of Kumara Valmiki in Kannada.
- Balarama of Balaramadasa and Mahabharata of Saraladasa in Odiya.
- Madhavakandali of the same name in Assami.
- Molla of Atukuri Molla and Ranganatha of Raja Gonabuddha in Telugu.
- Kamba of Kambana in Tamila.
- Bhavartha of Ekanatha in Marathi.
- Ramacharita-manasa of Tulsidasa in Hindi.

Four more, namely, (1) Adbhuta in Sanskrit, (2) Pampa in Kannada, (3) Ramayana – Masihi in Persian and (4) Pavumachriyam in Prakrit are also well known. There are still 18 more – not so well known.

Valmiki – The author :

From the internal evidence available, it is clear that this epic Ramayana has been composed by the sage Valmiki. In Uttarakanda 96 -18 to 21, the sage gives his genealogy. He is the tenth son of the great seer Prachetasa. He further confidently asserts that he had led all his life in a very truthful and righteous way. It was because of the virtuous way of himself he averred that he had realised that Sita, when she was left near his Ashrama by Lakshmana, was without a shade of doubt pure both in her heart and body. He, therefore, had taken her to his Ashrama (hermitage) and given shelter when she needed it most.

Many legends have grown round the name of this epic poet. The most popular is that he was born in a brahmin family, but was spoiled by the company of a hunter with whom he came in contact. He became a high-way robber. He, however, through a stroke of good fortune, came in contact of the itinerant sage Narada. Through his advice he took to the *Rama-nama-japa*- repetition of the holy name of Rama. He then became a great poet and wrote this first great epic of mankind.

From his own statement in the epic itself, it is as clear as daylight that the legend noted earlier is a pure fiction. Somebody with very good and pious intention concocted this story. The intention was to show to the world that the repetition of the name of Rama transforms even a robber into a great sage.

Again this sage avers that in his Ashrama the twins Kusha and Lava were born to Sita. So it is clear that he was the contemporary of Rama whose date we have shown to be the 10th January 4439 B.C. on astronomic grounds. Some doubts have been raised about the contemporaneity of Rama and the sage Valmiki, for there is a statement in the Epic, which shows that this story of Rama had come down to the author from very early times. The statement runs thus : "In the great line of the Kings of Ikshvaku, a very illustrious King by name Rama had arisen." (1-5-3) Obviously this statement cannot be attributed to Valmiki himself. The real narration of the life of Rama starts from 1-5-5. Most of the earlier verses are from the pen of some later writer who has handed down the epic as composed by Valmiki to posterity. This writer tells us in 1-4-1 & 2 : "After Rama was crowned King, the sage Valmiki composed the whole history of Rama in all its details. He narrated these details in 24000 verses in 500 chapters in six parts." Obviously such statements about Valmiki himself in third person are from the pen of somebody who has edited the original composition of 24000 verses. There are many such statements like : 'the blessed sage Valmiki composed these' (1-3-39) "The great sage decided to reduce to writing the life of Rama" (1-2-41) and so on. In this respect one can profitably refer to 6-128-105, 2-56-16, 17. 7-45-17, 7-49-7 to 10 etc.

II

Rama : The Ideal King

Ramayana being the first epic of mankind, Valmiki is rightly hailed as the Adi-Kavi or the First Poet of this world. How did Valmiki get the inspiration to write such a unique composition?

His intense grief at the ghastly sight of the male-bird falling a prey to the dart of a hunter's bow gave vent to a spontaneous composition of a verse in Anushtubh metre. This is said to be first literary expression of the Sanskrit muse in verse outside the Veda. From this came the definition of the poetry as the 'impassioned utterance of a heart filled with powerful emotions.' In such a state of mind, Valmiki felt : "The creator himself has given him the command to compose the life story of Rama the embodiment of all superhuman qualities."

There is an unbroken tradition that this is the first history of its type amongst men. Bhavabhuti in his Uttara-Rama-Charita II :

*"atha sa bhagavān prācetasah prathamam, manuṣyeṣu śabal -
brahmaṇah tādṛśam, vivartam itihāsam Rāmāyaṇam praṇināya.*

- That blessed son of the sage Prachetasa, composed the life story of the incarnation of the Lord namely Ramayana, the first of its kind amongst men." Kshemendra in his Ramayana - Manjari repeats the very sentiments when he hails Valmiki as 'Jyestho Jayati Valmikiḥ - Valmiki is the eldest of the poets.' Even Appayya Dikshita the poet-philosopher feels that Valmiki is the *Brahmā* the creator of Sanskrit poetry - *Valmikiḥ adikavirat sāksād virincih iva*. Valmiki the first King of poets is described as the very abode of Saraswati, the Muse of poetry.

Rama : The ideal king :

Just as Valmiki is the King amongst the poets, so is the subject of his Epic. Can we believe such a person as Rama walked in flesh and blood on this mother Earth? He was an unequalled hero not only of his times, but of all climes and times, with the only exception of Lord Krishna. He is the very personification of the Vedic teachings - 'Here there is none greater or smaller. All have come together for the common welfare of all.' (RV 5-60-5) Valmiki has very successfully recreated for us through his simple but artistic composition the glory of Rama - a historical personage of the ancient times. He is the living symbol of the dead past. His very name conjures up in our minds the image of a living, moving and dynamic person spreading joy and happiness all around. Rama, though he lived about seven thousands of years ago, yet every one of us considers him even today, our Lord Protector. The repetition of his name gives us self confidence

and enables us to face all the travails and tribulations of life and enjoy it to the fullest. Rama and Krishna the heroes of the two world famous epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively, are our friends, philosophers and guides, solving our daytoday problems that we face in this mundane life, and leading us to enjoy that immeasurable bliss – the living presence of God Himself. Rama's life and achievements are a practical guide to every sensitive man interested in living well and happily himself, and helping his fellow beings to do so as well.

The aim of Vedic education is to keep alive the knowledge of the past through Itihasa – the record of the living tradition. The ancients have used this word – Itihasa – to distinguish Ramayana and Mahabharata from other great literary works. The poets have not merely recorded the events in the lives of these great men, Rama and Krishna, but they have written these with a view to show how to fashion our own as well as social life for the benefit of us all. As Aurobindo puts it : “They wrote with a sense of their function as architects and sculptors of life, creative exponents, fashioners of significant forms of the national thought and religion and ethics and culture. A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea runs through these poetries and the whole of ancient culture of India is embodied in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation. The Mahabharata has been spoken of as the fifth Veda. It has been said of both these poems that they are not only great poems but Dharma-Shastras, the body of a large religion and ethical and social and political teachings, and their effect and hold on the mind and life of the Indian-People.”⁸

What is contained in the Vedas and the Upanishads and other Dharma Shastras is vividly presented in these epics, through the delineation of living characters, the actors on the stage of history. Ramayana has particularly an enigmatic hold on the Indian mind. Rama and his consort Sita, these words are the property of every household in India. Their lives have fashioned much of what is the best and the sweetest in Indian national character.

Ramayana : The bridge between the North and the South :

The sage Agastya, the younger brother of the great sage Vasishtha the family priest of Dasharatha and his predecessors, was the first Vedic seer to set his foot in the south of the Vindhya mountains. He is the patron saint of the South Indian Culture. The Agastyan grammar gave structural shape to the Tamil Language. But the advancement of the Vedic culture in a big way was made possible by the exile of Rama by Dasharatha the King of the Koshas with their capital Ayodhya. What Dasharatha did most reluctantly namely the banishment of Rama his most beloved son, was the potent cause of the integration of the North India with the South, thus forging an inseparable cultural

union between these two halves.

In the first volume of this series, we have seen that the Dasharajna war was the great event in Ancient Indian history. It took place around 7000 B.C. After this cataclysmic event, the Vedics began to spread far and wide all over India. The sage Agastya carried the message of the Vedas to every nook and corner of India, soon after this event.

It is necessary to remember that the names like Vasishtha, Agastya, Vishwamitra, are the family names. The later members of those families are the contemporaries of Dasharatha, Rama and others in this Epic.

After Agastya had established his hermitage in the south many others followed and there was large scale colonisation of the Southern areas by the Vedics. It was the constant complaint of these southern Vedics that their hermitages were not safe and the marauders in the south were always attacking those rendering the continuance of their religious and cultural practices, impossible. Rama's banishment proved a boon to these.

Rama portrayed as man :

Valmiki's portrayal of Rama is as a man and not as an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu – the supreme Godhead. In some chapters, particularly in 1-15-16, Rama is stated to be an *avatara*, yet Valmiki portrays his life as a man with superhuman valour and virtues. Rama himself in 6-117-11 considers himself to be a man –the earthly being, a son of King Dasharatha. Then the creator Brahma reminds him that you are Lord Vishnu and Sita is Goddess Lakshmi. Rama had assumed the human form to rid the earth of the demons and their supremo Ravana.

Here it should not be forgotten that Ramayana is the story of the exploits of Rama and of the ideals cherished by both Sita and her Rama. One cannot be separated from the other. Sita-Rama is one soul in two bodies. Both are equally great. This is the ideal couple unparalleled in the whole history of man-kind. It is because of this that this couple is regarded as the incarnation of God Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. This is the story of man and woman undaunted by doubts or difficulties, struggling hard to surmount these and ultimately succeeding in their designs. They were the children of the mortals, becoming immortal by sheer indomitable will.

Rama was the eldest son of Dasharatha of the Ikshvaku family of the solar line. The capital city was known as Ayodhya. It was a very large city with well-planned roads and gardens. It was the abode of the learned in different branches of knowledge, arts and sciences as well as of the merchant princes. It had also separate quarters for ambassadors of different countries and regions. It was as affluent as

the capital city Amaravati of the Gods. In this city none who was cruel, sensual, poor, atheist or uneducated was found (1-68).

Dasharatha the king was also learned in all arts and sciences including military. His ministers too were alert and well-versed in all the branches of administration. He was also well advised by the sages and seers. He was also well-served by the Suta, Magadha and Charana.

Rama had also three other brothers born of different mothers. He was the son of Queen Kausalya, his two brothers Lakshmana and Shatrughna were the sons of another Queen Sumitra and the third brother Bharata was born of Kaikayi the youngest and the most beautiful of the Queens. These sons were born to Dasharatha in the late stage of his life. They were born due to the performance of a sacrifice for progeny.

These four sons were given training in all branches of arts and sciences, under the direct guidance of the family priest Vasishtha. They all grew into worthy princes of the solar line. Dasharatha now thought of their matrimony.

While the King was thus well-pleased with his grown up and virtuous sons, and was engaged in his kingly duties, the ushers announced the arrival of the great sage Vishwamitra.

Sage Vishwamitra :

Vishwamitra was a King. But finding that the sage Vasistha with no kingdom, was revered by the greatest of the Emperors and had also independent powers to control the elements, he had renounced his Kingship to be like him. Through terrible austerities he got all the weapons and also acquired knowledge, through different experiments, to grow many useful herbs and plants. Through biological experiments he had also tried to gain control over the art of prolonging life. Trishanku, the 31st King in the solar line (Rama was either 64th or 71st in this line) was actually being trained to go to the upper heavenly regions in the earthly body by Vishwamitra. All his experiments could not achieve his desired object namely gaining peace within, nor could he send Trishanku to heaven in his mortal coil. Was Vishwamitra developing space-rockets with man inside, hurtling round the Earth?

Vishwamitra was invoking his spiritual powers to win more and more temporal gains. His desires remained unsatiated. It was some sort of a competition between the temporal science of physics and Vedanta the science of life, the aim of which is harmony between the spiritual and temporal. The Vedanta teaches us to have mastery over nature but not at the cost of ecological balance. The Vedas state "*Adabadhāni varuṇasya vṛtāni* – the laws laid down by Lord Varuna (Nature) cannot be transgressed or disturbed." Here Vishwamitra was trying to send Trishanku a good and pious king with a very handsome body directly

to heaven. This is against the scheme of the laws of the universe. Vasishtha could not bless such an attempt. He addressed Vishwamitra as a Maharshi a great sage, master of many arts and sciences. But he could not be hailed a Brahmarshi the master who had gained absolute control over his sense desires and mind. The more experiments he made and the more knowledge he gained through these pursuits, the more puffed up he became. He could not control his passions. Vishwamitra ultimately realised that the path to liberation did not run through learning and haughtiness. But it is through love of his fellow beings. By bodily austerities or starvation, you destroy the body, the vehicle for your earthly use as well as for realising your goal in life. By more and more material production and creating unbridled affluence, you also destroy this vehicle through improper use; you have to use it to realise your real nature and to spread peace around.

This the sage Vishwamitra ultimately realised and brought about a change in his attitude to life. Vasishtha then hailed him as a Brahmarshi. Vishwamitra then gained peace within.

A sage from such a family background had arrived at Dasharatha's court. One would easily see that this Vishwamitra belonged to the same family line as the one who became Brahmarshi by the grace of the sage Vasistha. Both these sages belonged to the same families as of yore.

His request : Dasharatha welcomed the sage with due honours. He put himself at his service and begged of him to command so that he would obey. Vishwamitra expressed the purpose of his arrival. He said : "We the sages are engaged in performing certain sacrifices. While these are nearing completion, the two demons Subahu and Maricha defile them. We can destroy them through the power of our Tapas – power gained through penance, but we don't want to use it. We want Rama to be with us for a few days. I am sure, he is capable of achieving our objective."

We know that Dasharatha had got those sons in his old age and that also through performing a sacrifice for getting progeny – *Putra Kameshti*. He loved them beyond measure. He was not prepared to part with them. He, therefore, begged of the sage to pardon him for the refusal of his request. He said, he himself was prepared to join him with his army. Vishwamitra's repeated requests would not alter the King's resolve. In fact Vishwamitra wanted to train these princes in the art of actual warfare and prepare them for a larger role in combating the menace of these *anaryas*, the uncivilised brutes. He also assured the King about his sons' safety. But blinded as the King was by his passionate love for his sons, that impassioned pleas of the sage would not budge the King an inch from his position. Vishwamitra

visibly disturbed spoke sternly : "This conduct is unworthy of your lineage" and prepared to leave the court. Just then Vasistha spoke gently and persuaded the King to part with his sons, Rama and Lakshmana. This saintly sage assured the King of the safety of his sons and pointed out that Vishwamitra was taking away his sons in their interests alone. With such assurance given by his own trusted sage, the King made up his mind and allowed his sons to accompany Vishwamitra.

The first thing the sage did as soon as they crossed the river Sharayu on the banks of which Ayodhya has been situated, was to impart the secret knowledge of the two weapons-systems' potent formula - *Bala (the powerful)* and *Atibala (very powerful)*, which Vishwamitra had acquired earlier. This gave Rama the opportunity to use his weapons very skilfully. In fact the princes' sojourn with Vishwamitra was for the purpose of imparting the higher knowledge of the different weapons - systems. This period was also used by Vishwamitra to train the princes for the hard life of the forest with its inherent dangers. For these forests were the hideouts of the Demons who disturbed the peace of the country-side and made the life of the hermits pursuing their higher studies difficult. The warriors who were supposed to protect them had necessarily to be used to hard forest life.

Literary style : The literary style which this great sage-poet Valmiki uses is also very direct and pleasing to the ear. When Vishwamitra arrives at the court and puts across to the king his request to part with his sons, the king says :

“ऊनषोडशवर्षो मे रामोराजीवलोचनः ।

न युद्धयोग्यतामस्य पश्यामि सह राक्षसे ॥

unaṣoḍaśavarṣo me rāmorājīvalocanah

na yuddhāyogyatāmasya paśyāmisaharākṣasaiḥ ॥ 1-20-2.

Mark here the anxiety of the king for the safety of his sons. He tells the sage - "They are not even sixteen years old. Moreover he is delicate of build. How can he face the powerful demons in war?" Or again :

“कौसल्यासुप्रजा राम पूर्वा संध्या प्रवर्तते ।

उत्तिष्ठ नरशार्दूल कर्तव्यं देवमान्दिकम् ॥

Kausalyasuprajā rāma purvā sandhyā pravartate

uttiṣṭha naraśardūla kartavyam daivamāndhikam ॥ (1-23-2)

Oh Rama the good son of Kausalya, the morning twilight is seen on the rise. Oh the lion amongst men, please get up and perform your morning ablutions." See the gentle way with which the sage is instructing the Prince to rise up before sunrise and perform the morning rituals and thus learn the first lessons in discipline. The Princes had passed that night on the bed of grass.

The sage is also acquainting the Princes with topographical features of the region and explaining the cultural significance of the places around. Their next stay after they had spent the first night on the bank of Sharayu, was *Kāmāśrama* in Anga – region (modern North Bihar). This place had been named *Kāmāśrama* for here Lord Shiva had burnt *Kama* to ashes (Madan or *kama* the Sexual urge.) The sage indirectly suggests to the Princes the importance of leading an austere life like that of Lord Shiva and the necessity of controlling the unbridled sex desire.

Tatakā Killed : After explaining the significance of different topographical regions and places on the way, they reached the forest named after the demoness Tatakā. Once it was peopled by the righteous souls and there were two splendid cities named Malada and Karusha. But this Tatakā a wicked woman born of a *Yaksha* – a demigod named Suketu, turned it into a playground for her atrocious acts. She was beautiful and was married to Sunda, another *Yaksha*. This forest was colonised by the sage Agastya. Sunda's haughty behaviour brought about a curse from the sage and as a result Sunda died. Since then Tatakā and her son Maricha had developed enmity with Agastya and his followers. Powerful and versed in warfare with magical powers, they made the life of the sages and the peaceful citizens there impossible. Vishwamitra's Siddhashrama was on a nearby hill. The sages there had also very hard time and no sacrifice could be performed in peace and devotion.

Tatakā was a woman of unusual strength and resourcefulness. Afraid of her, no one dared to enter her domains. Vishwamitra commanded Rama to kill her. Rama, trained as he was in Vedic lore, raised his doubt as to how a Kshatriya could kill a woman. He said he would cut off her limbs and immobilise her, so that she would become harmless. When Rama strung his bow and twanged it, its noise reverberated throughout the forest and the wild animals ran in all directions in terror. This shrill noise brought out Tatakā in the open from her mountain fastness. She assumed a terrible form and began pelting stones on Rama and Lakshmana. In an instant she would disappear in sky but would not stop from raining stones, rocks and other missiles on these two young princes. Vishwamitra advised Rama that killing even a woman for the safety of the virtuous was no crime. He gave many examples from past history in support of his plea. He ultimately stated : "The sun is about to set. These demons grow stronger by night. So the delay would be dangerous." Rama then remembered his father's advice : "Act as you are commanded by the sage." He then without hesitation aimed a deadly arrow at her chest. It did its job and the female monster roaring with rage fell down lifeless.

The ancient weapons-system : With the death of Tataka, the forest again hummed with activity. Rama rose in estimation of the sage as well as of the other foresters. With the killing of Tatakā big obstacle

was removed from their path, the sages then began organising a big sacrifice at Siddhashrama. In the meanwhile Vishwamitra began instructing Rama in the use of newer and more deadly weapons. Ever active and alert in mind, Rama mastered these quickly and requested for more.

Here we have to remember that these deadlier weapons are described as *astras* – missiles – in our ancient literature. They are named as – *Agnyastra*, fire missile, *Vayavyastra* – wind-missile, *Parjanyastra* – rain missile and so on. More details about their manufacture or use are not given. It is all along stated that with the special *Mantras* – (Mantra etymologically means, what protects you by constant thinking of the particular letters or words.) the word derived from – मन् man – to think and त्र tra – to protect. In this sense Mantra is Devata or Deity. Special weapons systems are thus mastered through the Mantras. Ultimate in these missiles is *Brahmastra* a tremendously powerful weapon such as hydrogen bomb of the modern nuclear weapons system. We have therefore to be satisfied with only stating these without offering any detailed explanations of these. In the *Mantrashastra*, however, detailed process of repetition of certain letters and words is given and it is stated that with the grace of certain devatas presiding over certain aspects of nature, these different weapons are obtained.

From the detailed study of Patanjali's *Yogasutras*, it can now confidently be stated that the *Mantra-Shastra* is not a "meaningless superstition." Those who do not know its significance may well state that. For the same reason the sages have stated that "little learning is a dangerous thing."

“इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेद्।

विभेति अल्पश्रुताद् वेदो मामयं प्रहरिष्यति॥

Itihāsa-purāṇābhyam vedam samupabṛṇhayetl

bibheti alpa-śrūtād-vedo māmāyam praharisyati॥

One should try to understand the meaning of the Veda from the detailed explanations given in the *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas*. The Veda fears the man of little knowledge, since he would inflict injury on him."

With the present state of our knowledge, this difficulty is still further compounded. As advised by the sages, if we turn to the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* for the correct significance of the meaning of the Vedas, we remain where we are. For the *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas* take for granted that we are the votaries of the *Mantra Shastra*, when they refer to the weapons – systems obtained by different heroes through the mastery over this science of the *Mantras*.

Mantra Shastra : Here the term *Veda* is used as *Mantra*.

Obviously this "Science of Mantra" cannot be a "meaningless jabber" when this has survived even today even in this "age of reason." It

must have some rationale behind it.

In Nasadiya Sukta (R.V.X - 129 2), the seer tells us that in the beginning (this universe is without beginning and end. However the Lord's creation process has to be described in the words we understand) there was nothing except that ONE - the Ultimate Reality, the Brahman of the Vedanta philosophy. Desire arose in Him (129-4). Thus the seers through their minds perfectly stilled through spiritual practices, discovered that the creation (the universe) has kinship with that unmanifest Brahman (129-4)

Through this desire of the Lord, the golden seed (*Hiranya-garbha-Prajapati*, the presiding deity over this whole creation) arose (R.V.X-121-1). Here the desire is the undifferentiated consciousness and the golden seed is His further will to be many. The *Upanishads* state the same in so many words (Tai.up.Bran.6) 'He desired - I shall multiply and be many.' The creation process then is described (in Tai-up-Bra-I) as from Him (*Atma or Brahman*) arose Akasha - ether or empty space capable of accommodating all matter in the universe. Its attribute is Shabda-word-sound. From this-air (Vayu), from air-fire (Agni), from fire - water (Apah), from water-the earth (Prithivi) from the earth-vegetation, from vegetation, the man. And in Mandukya Upanishad the sound OM is equated with Brahman and it is averred from sound everything else has arisen.

This Brahman is thus : (i) pure consciousness (*cit*) and it has desire to create, and so it is full of (ii) bliss-love-(Ananda) the whole creation around being our experience. It is also (iii) pure existence - *sat* This Brahman has further (i) power of will (*iccha*) (ii) power of knowledge (*Jnāna*) and (iii) the power of action (*kriya*). The Brahman inherently equipped as it is with all these categories, It brings about this pluralistic universe. We need not further dilate on this creation process. Suffice it to say for our purpose here that the universe in its fundamental aspect is SOUND - Mantra - OM.

Sound or Vāk was the medium through which the Lord created all things whatever, the Vedas, Mantras, Sacrifices and all creatures. (Bri. Ar.Up. 1-2-5). In Mahabharata Sarasvati as Vak is called the 'Mother of the Vedas' (Shanti V-12-125-5). The Rigveda also notes the power of Vāk 'I-Vāk make him whom I love a formidable Brāhmana, a Rishi or a Sage' (R.V.X-125-5). There are other references to Vāk in the Rigveda in (I-164-39 & X-71-3).

The point to note is that the Lord has created this universe through Shabda-word-sound-Mantra. These all are, however, not synonymous terms. Mantra is that particular sound by the "meditation on which one acquires freedom from sin, enjoyment of heaven and the attainment of liberation." It is used in worship of deity and in spiritual practice.

It consists of certain letters arranged in a definite sequence of sounds. The Mantra uttered with particular intonation and rhythm reveals the Deity behind it to the consciousness of the Sadhaka – the worshipper or the practitioner. If it is translated in other languages or even explained in the same language it cannot evoke the Deity. In translation it is not the same sound and so cannot have the same effect on the Sadhaka. Mantra awakens the superhuman latent power in the Sadhaka. The language perfected for this purpose is sanskrita.

As the Vedas declare shabda or sound is His first creation and from Shabda all other things have sprung up. Mantra has its own inherent power. When it is coupled with the power of the Sadhaka, he acquires its fruit. The Deity behind the Mantra gives the Sadhaka the fruit he desires. The Sadhaka has to follow certain rigid discipline. *Mantra-Devata* has to be awakened by the Sadhaka by his sustained and disciplined practice. He should be pure in mind and body and start practicing the Mantra. Then by his devotion the Deity is as if awakened and helps the Sadhaka to accomplish what he desires.

Patanjali also in his *Yogasutras* states (in I-27) that the sound OM is His manifestation. The creation is thus preceded by the sound OM. Brahman in its original state is pure consciousness. But creation commences by an initial movement or vibration in Brahman. Om the first sound is the first vibration. The modern science also accepts that all matter in this universe is just the gross manifestation of that 'All In One-Principle'. The energy wave or particle – the electron (it can also be subdivided. But for facility of discussion we shall take it as the first particle) is the building block of this universe. It is always in motion. And according to Vedantins – *all motion is conscious (Prajnanam Brahma)* though the degree of consciousness may vary from object to object. Mantra is thus motion or vibration and is also conscious.

In an experiment conducted in the Czech Observatory in 1935, the moon's rays were made audible. The moonlight was converted into sound waves and the result was a long drawn, harmonious, increasing and fading sound in the pitch of 'A'. The waves were recorded at the same time and broadcast.⁹

The sound waves like light waves are just two aspects of the same Primal energy (the Brahman) and the one wave can be converted into the other. In *Yogasutras* (3-15), we have another Sutra.

“क्रमान्यत्वं परिणामान्यत्वे हेतुः ।

Kramānyatvam pariṇāmānyatve hetuḥ

– different objects are due to different arrangements of atoms.” The modern scientists also use the same language to explain the multiplicity of objects in this world. For example – H_2O water, here H has 1 electron + 1 proton. It has no neutron. So it is not a stable atom,

when 2 of H is combined with 1 of O (Oxygen). O has 8 electrons + 8 protons + 8 neutrons. The combination of H_2O is water. Now glucose has $C_6 + H_{12} + O_6$. C(carbon) has 6 electrons + 6 protons + 6 Neutrons. This way all the objects in this vast universe are formed. The Vedic principle of *unity in diversity* is thus upheld by the modern science.

The Vedic creation process described above – from Atman the Akasha, from Akasha the Vayu etc, shows that the emergent substance i.e. Akasha from Atman or Vayu from akasha etc. is different from its base and becomes comparatively denser and denser. The One original substance becomes these different objects with different characteristics. The individual consciousness – *Jivātma* gets the body constituted of the five elements – ether (Akasha), air, fire, water and the earth. The Ten sense-organs are : Ear (Sound), Skin (touch–attribute of air), eye (form or rupa), tongue (Rasa or water) and nose (smell) – these are five senses of perception. The other five senses of actions are : hands, feet, speech, anus and penis. With the help of these ten senses and his intellect and mind, the individual soul works with the outer world.

It will thus be seen that the master (Jiva) who lives in the body has assigned some limited functions to different senses. Even if the eye can see things around, it cannot see the ultra-violet or the infra-red rays. To do so, their power has to be increased through some instruments. The experiment in the Czech laboratory has shown that sound waves can be changed in to light waves or vice-versa. This means that there is possibility of raising the power of one sense to the other by changing the frequency of the waves : If the power of one sense can thus be raised or lowered to that of the other, all the senses can give the same experience. Thus the eye can see, as well as hear, taste or smell, and so on.

If all the senses are on one level, no sense of separateness or multiplicity is possible. Similarly with the Mantra, it is possible for the senses to be on the level of the deity which it represents and perform its functions. The Yogasutra (1-28) assures us that the constant repetition of the Mantra enables Sadhaka to meditate on its meaning. And it is thus the Deity behind the Mantra, that is invoked. For example, the Mantra–*Namah Shivaya* – *I bow down before Shiva (Shankara), the deity that produces missiles and also confers boons that are asked for. It is further stated that – Japāt Siddih adūratah* – through the repetition of the Mantra, attainment is hastened and whatever is desired is speedily fulfilled.

We have even today around us the Siddhas – the masters who through certain spiritual practices have attained certain super-human powers. We call these miracles. We witness these when we are in the presence of the saintly figures like Shri Satya Sai of Puttaparthi in Andhra

Pradesh-India. That these superhuman feats are possible, is a daily experience. The science of Yogashastra, of which Mantrashashtra is a part, shows that these attainments are not only not superhuman but also are not supernatural.

Those who are uninstructed in this branch of science developed by our seers tend to ridicule the claims made by the adherents of these. But with the development of modern physics, the Indian spiritualists claim that this whole universe is nothing but a play of the Primal Energy-Brahman, has become an acceptable proposition. We now accept the statement 'All-in-one' or the whole universe can be resolved into waves. Thus the whole universe is waves = motion = vibrations = action : Action and reaction have certain fixed laws - laws of motion. These are developed by the Indian seers into the principles of Karma and the doctrine of incarnation.

The objective of Jiva - individual consciousness - is thus to merge sooner or later into universal consciousness i.e. Absolute unconditioned one-ness. As the ultimate Reality is ONE - Pure Energy and as the different powers of different senses are derived from this one source, it is possible to interchange them e.g. - from audibility to seeing etc. These powers can be developed by human beings through spiritual practices as prescribed by *Yogashastra* or *Mantrashashtra*.

The ancient seers of India, who have composed these sciences were themselves believers in rationalism. In Yoga-Vasistha there is a clear statement to this effect -

“अपि पौरुषं आदेयं शास्त्रं चेद् युक्ति बोधकम् ।

अन्यत् त्वार्षं अपि त्याज्यं भाष्यं न्याय्यैकसेविना ॥

युक्तियुक्तं उपादेयं वचनं बालकादपि ।

अन्यत् तृणं एव त्याज्यं अयुक्तं पद्मजन्मना ॥

Api pauruṣam ādeyam śāstram ced yuktibodhakam |

anyat tvārsam api tyājyam bhāṣyam nyāyīkasevinā ||

yuktiyuktam upādeyam vacanam bālakād api |

anyat tṛṇam eva tyājyam apyuktam padmajanmanā ||

- Even a science formulated by a human being is acceptable if conformable to reason. Anything which does not stand to reason even though spoken by a seer, is to be rejected. A word of a boy if reasonable is acceptable. But what is unreasonable, even if it be uttered by Brahma, the lotus-born Himself, should be discarded as of no more worth than a blade of grass." Even the great Shankaracharya says as much - if Veda were to contradict what is a matter of direct-proof, it would not be acceptable.

With such an attitude of mind, these seers assert that these psychic powers (Siddhis) acquired by the yogis, through spiritual practices, are just extensions of natural faculty and nothing above those. They are

not supernatural though they are certainly supernormal. There is nothing unscientific about these. To dub these as unscientific is scientific bigotry.

This little diversion from the main story of the epic should remove many misconceptions about facts and fiction in this very important source of ancient Indian history.

Maricha and Subahu Slain : With the removal of Tatakā from their path, the foresters felt assured of their safety. They looked upon Rama as their protector. They then arranged an elaborate sacrifice at Siddhashrama – Vishvamitra's hermitage on the nearby hill. Vishvamitra was also mightily pleased with Rama. He gave them (Rama and Lakshman both) the knowledge of the use of the different weapons and missiles. He assured them : "With these you will be able to rout your enemies whoever they may be, gods, anti-god, gandharvas and nagas. These are divine weapons Rama, accept these."

Rama and Lakshmana were gaining in strength day by day.

The sacrifice was commenced. Vishvamitra was under a vow of silence. His juniors told these two heroes to keep vigil for six days and nights. On the sixth day the army of the demons led by Maricha and Subahu came roaring. The two brothers were ready and prepared to meet their challenge. As they came pelting stones and rocks and discharging arrows, the sages and priests assembled to perform the sacrifice were quite disturbed. These two brothers assured them of their safety and rushed forward. With one special arrow Maricha was hurled away a full hundred yojanas near the sea. It may mean that after defeat he returned to his domain near Gokarna in the present Karwar District of Karnataka State. Subahu was directly hit on the chest. After the removal of these two leaders of theirs, the entire army of the Rakshasas was destroyed and the Tatakavana was made safe for the priests, the sages and the common cultivators and the artisans. Maricha was son of Tataka and Sunda.

Both these brothers now got immense training in actual warfare as well as in leading a hard life. Vishvamitra was also pleased with the exhibition of prowess and skill in battle by these two Princes.

Janaka the King of Mithila : The sages then told the Princes that they were going to witness the sacrifice being performed at the palace of King Janaka at his capital at Mithila. They told them that there was a very marvellous bow in the court of Janaka. Their curiosity to see it was aroused and they accompanied Vishvamitra's disciples and other sages, and were on their way to the capital city, Mithila.

Janaka was a philosopher King. He figures in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as the beloved pupil of Yajnavalkya imbibing the knowledge of Brahman. Lord Krishna also cites him as one of the illustrious

followers of *Karmayoga*. While tilling the soil, Janaka noticed a divinely beautiful baby. Childless as he was, he adopted the girl as his daughter and named her Sita. Janaka and his queen brought her up in the Royal household and she grew into a very ideal woman with all virtues present in her.

Janaka had an ancient heavenly bow. It was so heavy that no ordinary man could even move it. Sita being an exceptional girl, Janaka wanted a groom worthy of her. He had proclaimed : "He will give Sita in marriage to that Prince who will lift, bend and string the bow of Shiva given to him by Varuna and to none other." Many young princes from far and wide had tried to lift the bow to string it, but none had succeeded.

Janaka also belongs to the solar line of Kings. We have very little information about the earlier Kings of this line. It is stated that the first great ancestor of Janaka was Nimi, the son of Ikshvaku. Another famous name in this line is that of Mithi who had founded the city of Mithila. Devarata is another famous King who had been given that famous bow by Lord Shiva Himself.

Rama's great ancestors : The earliest famous name after Ikshvaku, the founder of this line is Parnanjaya, the son of Vikukshi. He appears to have used bull as his carrier and was therefore named *Kākutstha*. In the Rigveda we get the names of Purukutsa and Trasadasya as great kings connected with Sudasa the hero of the great Dasharajna war (Ten-Kings war). Before Sudasa, the kings of the Ikshvaku line were somewhere in Sumeria (the modern Iraq) as the Kish-Chronicle earlier referred to indicates.

After the Dashrajna war, the Vedic people spread over all the world. Ionians get the name from Anu the son of Yayati, a later King of from the line Ila-Ikshvaku's sister. Near Lepensky Veer a region near the river Danube, a human skeleton in the yogic pose is found. It is dated 5000 B.C. This Veer is on the border of Yugoslavia and Romania

A later Ikshvaku founded his line at Ayodhya, when the Aryas spread to the eastern regions of Bharata after the Dasharajna war. The city was called Ayodhya—the impregnable, as it was a very fortified city. The name Ikshvaku appears to have been derived from Ikshu—the sugar cane plant. This King appears to be the pioneer in developing sugar-cane.

Another illustrious King of this dynasty is *Mandhata*. He was the son of Yuvanashva and was an Emperor (*charkavartin*). There is a place called Omkara-Mandhata on the banks of the river Narmada. The famous Jyotirlinga Omkara Amleshwara is located here. It is about 90 kms from Indore in Madhya Pradesh in India. It may have been the capital of this Mandhata – the Emperor. *Trishanku* is another famous

name in this dynasty. His original name was Satyavrata. We have referred to his queer desire to gain immortality for his mortal coil. *Harischandra* the embodiment of truthfulness and virtue, was the son of Trishanku. He was also an Emperor. The sage Vishwamitra had put him to very severe tests to prove his vow to be truthful under any circumstances. Ultimately he and his wife had to sell themselves as slaves to a lowly man named Domba who was in charge of the disposal of the dead at Kashi-Varanashi the holiest of the holy cities of India. But he did not break his vow. His name is now enshrined in many popular folk stories.

After these famous names, we come to *Sagara*, the Emperor, who appears to have gained mastery over the sea. *Sagara* means ocean. It is called *Sāgara* after this King's name. *Vibhishana*, *Ravana's* brother, tells Rama that the sea around *Rameshwara* was created after the land there was dug out by *Sagara* (6-19-31). It is said that he had sixty thousand sons who all perished in the sea. It may be that *Sagara* was a very ambitious and efficient King. He also loved his subjects like his sons. Particularly he appears to have created an army of Engineers who might have helped him to gain mastery over the Eastern sea and areas around its coast (probably around modern Calcutta). He was very careful about their welfare. However these sixty thousand Engineers met their watery grave and the King became very sad at heart. His son *Asamanjasa* was a stupid and at the same a cruel King. He was dethroned by his subjects. The people had given an ultimatum to *Sagara* to choose between them and this cruel King (2-36-20). *Sagara* then banished him from his kingdom.

Sagara's grandson *Amshuman* was a very brave and mighty King. He was also an Emperor. It appears that to rid the land of the scarcity of water and the constant visits of famines Kings from *Sagara* onwards were engaged in providing a canal system throughout their Kingdoms which covered almost the whole of North India. After *Sagara*, *Amshuman* had continued the work. He had started digging canals right from the Himalayas in all directions in his Kingdom, west, north, south and east, (see chapters 39 to 40 of *Balakanda* of *Valmiki Ramayana*). *Amshuman* had made a vast survey of the regions around and located the abundant source of water in *Bindu-sarovara* in the Himalayas. He had also seen the river *Ganga* flowing with gusto in the Himalayan slopes. His anxiety was to change its course and make it to flow down the Himalayan ranges. He had handed over the actual administration of his Empire to his son *Dilipa* aided and advised by his able ministers, and established his camp in the Himalayas to supervise this work of diverting the flow of the river *Ganga* towards the Southern Himalayan slopes.

This is the possible explanation of the story in the *Ramayana* that *Sagara* had started the *Ashvamedha*-horse sacrifice, but his horse was stolen. He then employed his sixty thousand sons on land-digging work

in search of the horse, which, it is stated was stolen and taken down to the nether regions. They perished in the attempt. Sagara started the search for their bones to perform their rites. This work was continued by his grand son Amshuman. The latter did very severe penance in the Himalayas. His son Dilipa thereafter continued his father's work which was ultimately completed by his son Bhagiratha.

Bhagiratha also handed over the Kingdom to his ministry and himself practised severe austerities. He at last succeeded in his objective and brought down the waters of the river Ganga to earth, and sprinkled them over the ashes of his ancestors who then ascended the heaven.

Before Ganga could actually reach the plains, there arose another difficulty. The young Himalayan soil was unable to withstand her force. It is stated that God Shiva contained her in the tangled maze of His matted locks. This may mean that the waters of Ganga first flowed through hard rocks before she could flow smoothly through the plains on her onward march to the sea where the bones and ashes of the sixty thousand sons of Sagara lay awaiting their liberation through the sweep of the waters of Ganga.

There was yet another mishap on the way. Ganga in her arrogance swept away the sacrificial platform of the sage Jahnu. He, it is said, took the entire flood in his palm and sipped it away. With the help of the sage and his disciples the way for Ganga was again made smooth and the Ganga thereafter made no troubles on the way. It may be that when the Ganga waters reached the plains of North India, Janhu tamed them by constructing dams on the way and digging canals to irrigate surrounding regions.

Bhagiratha's name is on everybody's lips and whoever puts in untiring efforts in achieving his good cause is said to have made Bhagiratha-efforts.

Churning of the Ocean : Ramayana appears to be the earliest history of India. We have narrated above the story of the descent of the river Ganga. The Indians have held this river in great esteem. It is the perennial source of life-giving waters to the northerners in India. But to all the Indians, northern as well as the southern, she is the holy mother Goddess. The Indians have an instinctive reverence for her and to have a dip in her waters atleast once in life-time is considered to be very holy. Many holy cities right from her source - the Gangotri in the Himalayas, Hrishikesh, Haridwar, Kashi (Varanashi), Prayag and many others on her bank, upto her meeting place near Calcutta have sprung up. The people from all parts of India visit these off and on to pay their homage to the Gods.

Like this story or historical narrative clothed in legendary language, there is yet another such legend incorporated in the *Ramayana*

(Balakananda-45th chapter).

It appears that in the hoary past, a concerted effort was made to secure the wealth of the oceans, particularly to secure the knowledge how to live well and live long (*Amarah*-immortal and *ajarah*without getting old).

The sons of Diti-Daityas - and the sons of Aditi - the Adityas - or Devas - (Diti and Aditi were the two wives of Kashyapa - the Prajapati - the father of mankind.)

Here a point can be made. In *Ramayana* we often hear the words like : Daityas, Rakshasās, Asuras, all translated as 'Demons' in English. The other words are : Devas or Suras and Manushyas. These latter mean the Gods or the bright, intelligent, powerful and pious ones and the men and women in general. These are not different species of mankind or any other kind. They are also not racially divided as Aryans or Dravidians. The difference between them is one of attitude, of character. These simply denote the attitudes of different human beings - with bad or good qualities in varying degrees. The demons are not men with horns on their heads or with eyes protruding out from their sockets.

Another point can also be made. In this Epic as well as in such ancient works, the period of life of man is given as having lived for tens of thousands of years. These figures cannot of course mean human years with 365 solar days. We have made an attempt in our Volume II to show that the year there may mean a day. But it is quite obvious to any one that the fantastic time span noted cannot mean human year of 365 days. All these Vedic seers know that the life span of man on earth is about 100 years. With very strict observance of rules of health it may extend to 116 as Mahidasa Aitareya the author of *Aitareya Upanishad* has noted. Lord Krishna is stated to have lived for 120 years. There are quite a few instances even today of men living upto 150 years. Perhaps in the first few thousand years after the present epoch of white boar (श्वेतवाराहकल्प) was ushered in, men lived upto 300 years.

Similarly God, the creator, the Brahman - the Pure Energy principle is *ONE* without a second. So the gods noted are the presiding deities over certain aspects of man's life such as *prithivi tattva* - the Earth Principle is Goddess Prithivi, the *Buddhi Tattva* - the Intellect is Goddess Sarasvati, or the sun - the giver of light - is the God Sun and so on.

With these observations, we can proceed with the story of 'Churning of the ocean.'

The Daityas and Devas once gathered together and decided to churn the milky ocean to obtain from it the life-giving medicines. They used the serpent-God as the chord and the mount Mandara as the churning rod. When they did this for thousand years the serpent god became

exhausted and began vomiting deadly poison. The poison caused the death of thousands around. The Rakshasas and Devas who were engaged in this act of churning, approached Lord Shankara, the Presiding Deity over the welfare of all beings, to find out a way for disposal of this deadly product of their act. This Lord out of compassion for the living beings drank the poison. Thereafter, they again proceeded with the act of churning. The rod in the form of mount Mandara could not hold its own. It began sinking. Then Lord Vishnu, the Presiding Deity over the maintenance aspect of the universe, held this rod aloft on the back in the form of a gaint tortoise.

Then after thousand years of churning, the efforts of the Devas and the Asuras were rewarded and there arose out of the ocean the first physician of the mankind named Dhanvantari. Along with him came beautiful women and hundreds of nurses with minds dedicated to the service of the living beings. Lord Varuna, the Presiding Deity over the oceans gave Varuni – medicinal wine a medium to act as preservative. Then came one after another the finest amongst the horses named Uchaishravas, the finest of the jewels Kaustubha. Then at last came – Amrita, the elixir of immortality. There was a great fight between the Gods and Demons to secure exclusive possession of this gift of the Lord. In this fight the demons were killed and the devas were successful. How can demons, the materialists triumph over the Devas, the spiritualists?

The lesson all the ancient literature of India wants to drive home to all mankind is the triumph of good over the evil.

Vishala line : When all Daityas were killed by the Devas, Diti the mother of the former approached Kashyapa the Prajapati, again for the birth of a mighty son who can defeat Indra, the King of the Devas. While she was carrying, Indra in the form of very devoted nurse attended on her. One day, Indra got an opportunity to break her foetus into seven pieces. Diti was distressed. She then requested Indra to convert these seven into her mighty sons named Maruttas obedient to him – the Indra.

In the third Ikshvaku solar line, there was born a mighty Marutta King. The King named Karandhama was the famous one of this line. He was also called Ikshita. He had his capital at Vishala not far from Mithila. This Ikshita's son was Avikshita. His son was Marutta, one of the mightiest kings of ancient India. He was born to Vishala, the daughter of the Vidisha King. He had performed many sacrifices.

The story of this famous dynasty is enshrined in our daily worship. It runs thus :

Ikshata was an Emperor. He was the follower of Varnashrama mode of life. When he found that his son Avikshita had come of age and

was brave and was versed in all the branches of administration as well as Vedic lore, he retired and took to forest life. Avikshita however fell in bad company and changed his attitude. The old and retired King was approached by the people and advised by the sages to bring him down from the throne. This had desired effect on the young King, who then improved his conduct and became an ideal monarch. So the daily prayer after waving of the lights (Arati) to Gods is : Avikshita surrounded by his mighty son Marutta be object of attention of all the gods. All his desires be fulfilled.

When Rama and Lakshmana visited this Vishala where the King Sumati of this third solar line was ruling then, they were welcomed by the King. They along with Vishwamitra and his entourage spent the night on the way to Mithila.

Ahalya : Not far from Mithila Rama saw a beautiful hermitage surrounded by ancient trees. It then appeared deserted. To satisfy the curiosity of Rama, Vishwamitra narrated the past incident as it had happened there.

The *ashrama* was tenanted by the famous sage Gautama and his wife Ahalya. One day while the sage was away at the river to perform morning ablutions, Indra infatuated by her beauty approached her disguised as the sage Gautama for union. Ahalya could recognise him as Indra, but out of curiosity, she accepted the overtures of Indra and had the union with him.

After the act, she was filled with remorse and entreated Indra to leave her instantly. While he was running away through coincidence he bumped into the sage Gautama who was then just returning from his morning rituals. Sensing that pretence was useless, he fell at his feet. The sage, however, cursed him and Indra lost his manhood. Ahalya in turn was cursed to observe long penance to live on air and remaining unseen by any one in the shrubs around. She could then after a long time regain her former self when she would be visited by Rama, the son of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya.

Rama then visited the Ashrama. Ahalya appeared before him in her serene beauty. Rama and Lakshmana fell at her feet. She was again reunited with her husband radiating with spiritual lustre. This pious couple, it appears were estranged, through misunderstanding. They were united together through Rama's grace.

These stories viz, churning of the ocean, Marutta's origin and the Ahalya episode, have some grain of historical truth. These are connected with Rama's life and have thus been introduced here. These convey utmost endeavour of our ancients to ensure controlled monarchical rule aimed at the welfare of the subjects and to impress upon the individuals the virtue of restrained and disciplined life. Even the mightiest of the

mighty, like Lord Indra, cannot escape punishment if he commits heinous crimes. Family is the pivotal unit of a happy society and the chastity between husband and wife is the touchstone of happy and united family, lustful beastliness is the very antithesis of happy married life. These stories carry another lesson. To err is human. But to gloat over and clothe these with some elaborate explanations is a despicable crime. One can be freed from the effects of sin by penitence and punishment. Yet another conclusion can be drawn from Rama's itinerary. There was practically no barrier between the territories of different Kings. One could travel from one Kingdom to another without being harassed or obstructed. Unless the Kings were at war, there were no restrictions on movements from one place to another. The whole of India was culturally one unit, though politically there were several units. Even with political boundaries, the ordinary citizens could move unhindered from their places to anywhere else in the land of Bharata Varsha.

In the Indra-Ahalya episode, there is a curious reference to the grafting of the testicles of one on to the other. Actually in 1-49-8, a statement has been made that the testicles of a goat are grafted on to those of Indra, the King. It may be that some nobleman had his testicles injured. This may be loss of man-hood by Indra. New ones were then grafted.

Rama's marriage with Sita : When the King Janaka heard of the arrival of Vishwamitra along with the Ayodhya Princes, he along with his preceptor received the sage and the Princes with all honour. When Shatananda, the eldest son of Gautama and Ahalya, heard the well-being of his parents and their reunion, he felt very happy.

Vishwamitra conveyed to Janaka the desire of Prince Rama to see that Shiva-bow. He welcomed the suggestion and directed his men to bring the sacred iron bow in which it was kept. It was kept on an eight wheeled carriage and dragged by several men. With the permission of the sage Vishwamitra and the King Janaka, Rama opened the box and lifted the bow effortlessly. He bent it and strung it and drew the string so forcefully that the bow snapped with a thundering sound. All the spectators rejoiced at the feat and clapped their hands heartily.

Janaka then proposed to offer his daughter Sita to Rama and another daughter Urmila to Lakshmana. At Vishwamitra's suggestion Janaka's brother Kushadhwaja also offered the hands of Mandavi and Shrutakirti to Bharata and Shatrughna respectively. This good news was conveyed to Dasharatha at Ayodhya. He with his queens and ministers quickly arrived at Mithila and on an auspicious day, all the Princes were married with traditional rites and with pomp and splendour befitting the union of the two great houses of Ayodhya and Mithila.

Parashurama completes his mission : While there was all-round rejoicing

at the turn of events and Dasharatha with his queens and ministers was returning to Ayodhya along with his sons and daughters-in-law, there arose a terrible calamity in the form of the presence of Parashurama on their way. He challenged Rama to a battle. Dasharatha was trembling in his shoes. He knew the wrath and powers of this Brahmin warrior. Because his father was killed by a Kshatriya King, he had vowed to destroy the Kshatriyas. And he had kept the vow. Dasharatha pleaded with him to spare the life of his son, for they had done nothing wrong to him. This Parashurama cannot be that celebrated Parashurama the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He must be his descendant.

Parashurama had another Vaishnava bow similar to that of the Shiva-bow, earlier broken by Rama at Mithila. Parashurama challenged Rama to repeat the feat with that Vaishnava bow. Rama did it in the twink of an eye. Parashurama felt subdued and accepted that the purpose of his *avatara* was over. He transferred all his powers to Rama. He thereafter passed the rest of his life as an ascetic on the Mahendra mountain.

III

Rama's Unrivalled Position As Heir-apparent

With the discomfiture of Parashurama at the hands of Rama, his successor, Rama's fame spread far and wide. He was unrivalled in strength and valour. The citizens of Ayodhya found him to be the embodiment of all virtues. Dasharatha's ministers recognised him to be the master of art and craft of running the Government. He was loved by one and all. He bore no hatred even towards those who could not bear his pre-eminence amongst men. He spoke softly with appropriate words and with precision. He was versed in all the branches of Vedic lore and had imbibed the philosophy of life sitting at the feet of his preceptor Vashishtha. He was handsome and faultless to the core. He was considered to be saint amongst men.

With all these admirable qualities present in him, the subjects longed for his elevation to the kingship. When Dasharatha came to know the wishes of his subjects, he was overjoyed. Immediately in consultation with his ministers, he convened the Rajasabha to decide the issue.

When all the ministers and the Kings of different regions together with all leading citizens of the realm were assembled in the courthall, Dasharatha expressed his desire to crown Rama as heir-apparent (Yuvaraja) and entrust to him the administration of the state. The assembly with joyous acclaim, approved with one voice Dashratha's proposal. At this

assembly, the King Janaka and the King of Kekayas—his brother-in-law were not invited. They were farther away from Ayodhya. Dasharatha had not invited Kaikeyi's father or brother for the marriage of her son Bharata. His brother-in-law Yudhajita brother of Kaikeyi was by chance available for marriage ceremonies. He felt that they would also rejoice in his decision. He, therefore, forthwith issued orders to his Prime Minister Sumantra to convey to Rama his decision to anoint him as Yuvaraj. In consultation with his preceptor Vasishtha and other sages, he also decided the next day as the most auspicious day for the coronation ceremony of Rama. It was the month of Chaitra and the nature was in her full bloom. The ruling constellation for the day was Pushya which was considered to be the most auspicious. There was no time left for further invitations. All assembled dignitaries were requested to stay for the occasion.

Dasharatha somehow had evil forebodings, and this was the prime single cause for ordering immediate coronation of Rama. He did not want to delay the ceremony even by a day. He felt delay would be dangerous. When the citizens of Ayodhya learnt of this decision, they were overwhelmed with joy. Hectic preparations suitable for such great event were started by all and nobody spared any effort to make it the most joyous occasion in living memory.

But fate willed otherwise : Rama and Sita were told to observe fast during the night and continue it next day till the ceremony was over. They meditated on Narayana, the Lord of the universe and fed the fire with oblations. They were making all preparations to perform their part with solemnity befitting the occasion.

The one person who was terribly upset at the news of Rama's coronation was Manthara, the lifelong maid and confidante of Kaikeyi, the youngest and the most beautiful queen of Dasharatha. She rushed to the chambers of Kaikeyi and cried aloud and in intemperate language conveyed the sad news (!) to Kaikeyi. But as Rama was the darling of her heart, even more than her son Bharata, she felt a great joy and offered her a garland of jewels not comprehending the import of the words of that evil-minded Manthara her family friend.

Manthara again scolded her with harsh words : "Oh, you fool, you do not realise the magnitude of the disaster falling on you. You will be slave of Kausalya hereafter and I would be downgraded to the position of a slave of a slave. The friends and maids of Sita would dance with joy, while those of your daughter-in-law would be deprived of all joy."

Kaikeyi still could not be roused to anger. Brought up as she was in the civilised traditions laid down by the *Vedas*, she felt that Rama being the eldest, had a natural right to the throne. She further assured

her and spoke with conviction : "Rama loves me as much as, if not more than, his mother Kausalya. His Kingship is just the Kingship of Bharata. I do not see the difference."

Had Rama many wives? Before proceeding further with this episode, let us clear the controversy around the statement of Manthara :

“हृष्टाः खलु भविष्यन्ति रामस्य परमाः स्त्रियः।

अप्रहृष्टाः भविष्यन्ति स्नुषास्ते भरतक्षये॥

hr̥sthāh khalu bhaviṣyanti Rāmasya paramāh striyāh

aprah̥sthāh bhaviṣyanti snuṣāste bharataksaye॥ 2-8-12

- All the women, great friends of Sita and of Rama's household will rejoice, while all your daughters-in-law will be sorrowful at the waning of Bharata's influence."

Rama all along has been hailed as the person who had vowed to be loyal to one and only one lawfully wedded wife. It is never said of him that he had any keeps. Rama is said to be *Ekapatni* - (with only one wife) and *Ekabāni* (reaching his target with only one arrow). Manthara's assertion simply means that with the elevation of Rama to Kingship, Sita his wife will be the queen and all her lady friends and maids will naturally gain in importance. And quite opposite will be the result with Bharata's household. Kaikeyi's daughter-in-law will have secondary position and so her friends and maids will also loose in esteem. This is the plain meaning of the verse. Neither Rama nor Bharata are known to have more than one wife.

There is a fashion amongst a few so-called progressives, intellectuals in our society, to effectively down-grade all what goes by our ancient heritage and attribute all sorts of vices to our heroes. Valmiki, Vyasa and other ancient writers are known for their integrity and veracity. But for them, we would not have much information about Rama or Krishna. If they had wanted to portray their heroes as absolutely clean and ideal men, they could as well have omitted some adverse statements or incidents. But they want to awaken the masses to the dangers of unrighteous (adharmic) behaviour. They want us to imbibe proper lessons from the different episodes narrated therein, and avoid the pitfalls which we are likely to face. If Rama had many wives Valmiki would have said so. He would not have been afraid of telling the truth. He brings out good points even in such evildoers as Ravana, the very antithesis of Rama. He points out that Dasharatha had many wives. He does not conceal anybody's failings. Rama was Kshatriya and nobody would have considered it to be unrighteous if Rama had more than one wife.

Again in this verse '*Paramāh striyāh*' is used in the same sense as '*Snuṣāh*' in the other half. In the first half the expression means 'friends of Sita' and in the other half, it means 'friends of Mandavi' -

Bharata's wife. In the verse no 11 just preceding, Manthara uses for herself – the word '*asmābhiḥ*' with us to denote many friends and maids like her. Otherwise there is no need to use plural here.

Rama is Exiled : To revert to the story again – with vituperative and malicious language, *Manthara at last succeeded* in her design and converted Kaikeyi to her point of view. Now Kaikeyi asked her friend to show her the way to remove Rama from the path of Bharata and to crown Bharata in his place.

Manthara then reminded Kaikeyi of the two boons Dasharatha had offered her, when she had saved his life in the battle in which he was fighting the demons on behalf of the gods. She advised her to seek these two boons. By one Rama was to be banished from the Kingdom and condemned to live in the forest for fourteen years and by the other Bharata was to be crowned as King in his place. It was a neat scheme. In fourteen years the people would forget Rama and would be used to Bharata's rule. The one important factor in all this stratagem not considered both by Kaikeyi and Manthara was Bharata's attitude. It was overlooked. Manthara felt, man loves power and so how can Bharata be an exception. She was demonic by nature and had never recognised the force of good and civilised upbringing.

Kaikeyi swallowed the prescription. She congratulated Manthara on her sagacity and resourcefulness. Instead of waiting for Dasharatha's usual visit to her apartments during night, she wore dirty garments and lay on the floor crying hoarse with anger. When King entered her suite and saw her in such unprecedented state, he was puzzled. He knew that Kaikeyi loved Rama as much as Bharata if not more. He had expected her to rejoice at the news that Rama was to be crowned the very next day. He wanted to spring surprise on her and to pass the night happily in her close embrace.

Soon he was disillusioned. Kaikeyi turned round and wrung out of him a promise that he would give her whatever she asked for. Now came her moment. Instead of he springing surprise on Kaikeyi, she sprang it on him and bluntly asked the King to banish Rama and crown her Bharata in his place. These words were like sharpened darts and they pierced the heart of that noble and truth-loving King. He tried to assuage her feelings by different stratagems, but obdurate as she had become possessed by a demon, she would not soften her stand. The vicious woman repeated her vow to send Rama to the forest and crown her son in his place. Her last words were a bolt from blue. She said : "You take pride in being a truth seeker and truth speaker. You have always stood by your plighted word, why do you now relent?"

He exclaimed : "Oh vile woman! You are a disgrace to all womanhood.

I loved you intensely. I even treated my other queens discourteously to please you. Rama did not utter even a single harsh word to you or to anybody. How can I banish him? What fault has he committed? Vicious woman! you are bent on taking my life. I can abandon anything on this earth, but not my Rama, the very life-breath in me." With these words, overtaken by grief, the King fell down unconscious. He recovered and thought to himself, "Well! I am bound down by my promise, but not Rama. He would not agree to his banishment." He then fell down again a hapless victim of the cruel fate.

The night passed and the day dawned. Nobody had an inkling of the tragedy being enacted in Kaikeyi's chamber. The palace and the city were all ready for the coronation. Vasishtha accompanied by the other sages and his disciples, carrying the golden vessels containing the holy waters of all the rivers, was approaching the coronation hall in a procession. The minister Sumantra approached Kaikeyi's chamber to convey the glad tidings that everything was ready for the occasion and that even preceptor Vasishtha had arrived and was waiting.

The King was speechless with agony. Kaikeyi instead spoke to him and commanded the minister to bring Rama at once to her chamber - Kaikeyi had decided to play the King's role then.

The minister then hurried to Rama's chamber and conveyed the message of Kaikeyi. Rama dutifully obeyed and at once arrived at that chamber and touched the feet of both of them and stood before them with folded hands. Dasharatha looked dejected and haggard. Rama was puzzled. But breaking the suspense and without mincing words, Kaikeyi narrated what had transpired between her and the King and asked Rama to take a vow that he would abide by whatever the king bids him to do.

Unhesitatingly Rama assured Kaikeyi. Then Kaikeyi felt exulted. She showered praise on him calling him a Dharmatma- the very soul of righteous conduct. She told him that she had obtained two promises from the King : (1) to banish Rama to forest life as an ascetic for fourteen years and (2) to crown Bharata in his place. At these words, Dasharatha's agony knew no bounds but Rama remained totally unperturbed. To the surprise of everyone around, Rama told Kaikeyi calmly : "To fulfil the promise made by my father to you, I shall leave this day for forest. I shall wear matted hair and tree-bark clothes and live like an ascetic."

What a man! Can any one believe that such a man in flesh and blood as Rama ever strode over this mother earth? Brahma's words, "This Ramakatha shall remain ever green in the minds of man, till the Himalayas stand and the rivers flow", were not uttered in vain. Breathes there the man who would not be moved by this marvel of a man?

Rama then began preparations to leave for the forest. A little while ago, he was preparing for being crowned. He had spent the whole night along with Sita in meditating on Lord Narayana. He rose early and had taken a ceremonial bath. He was about to leave for coronation, when Kaikeyi summoned him and conveyed the stunning news of his banishment with apparent glee. After hearing the news of his banishment, Rama with the same steadfastness prepared himself to leave for ascetic life in a forest.

He came to bid goodbye to his mother Kausalya. When she heard the news, she could not believe her ears. Her grief was beyond words. By now Lakshmana, Sita and every citizen in Ayodhya had come to know what had happened. Everybody showered abuses on Kaikeyi. Possessed as she was by terrible ghost, she commanded the minister to despatch messengers posthaste to her father's house and bring Bharata for being crowned.

Lakshmana was beside himself with rage. He went to Kausalya's apartments where Rama had gone to take leave of her. Lakshmana angrily told Rama not to obey the command of that doting old man who had lost his senses over his young wife. He told everybody around loudly that his father was not fit to be a King.

Lakshmana's unbounded grief moved even the duller soul but had no effect on Kaikeyi. Rama took him apart and consoled him with the words : "Lakshmana you are my other self, control your anger. We have to follow Dharma. We have to abide by our father's solemn promises to his wife. I have no love for the throne. My only regret is that Bharata did not ask me for it. I would have gladly given it to him for mere asking."

He then told everybody, to remember that his banishment was not the fault of his father, nor that of Kaikeyi, nor that of Bharata. It was his destiny.

But Lakshmana was not to be pacified by these words even though they had come from his God, Rama. He regarded Rama as the incarnation of all virtues and valour. He shot back : "Oh Rama! Is it not the duty of the Kshatriyas to fight evil and establish Dharma. I would banish those who dare banish you, you have only to give the word go."

Rama again gently patted Lakshmana and said "Oh my dear one! As long as our parents are alive we have to obey their commands."

Kausalya's consent obtained : Rama had great difficulty in convincing Kausalya, Lakshmana and Sita that the path he had chosen was the path of Dharma. First to be convinced was his mother Kausalya. He reminded her of her duty to be by the side of his grief-stricken father.

He had been deserted by Kaikeyi. Fate had conspired against him and brought him on the brink of his death. He assured her, he would return hale and hearty after fourteen years and would be again with her. Kausalya finding that Rama was very steadfast in his resolve to follow his conception of Dharma, she relented. She wished him well. After receiving this benediction from his mother, Rama's face glowed with effulgence.

Sita would not relent : Rama then approached his spouse to bid her goodbye. He described the rigours of forest life and advised her to be loyal to Bharata and obedient to the queen mothers. "I hope your love for me will not be on the wane during my absence", he said.

Sita and Rama loved each other so intensely that Rama's words were jarring to her ears. She was astounded to find Rama propounding a strange doctrine that there is divergence of interests between the husband and the wife. Sita said : "The duties of husband and wife converge and are complementary and one cannot do without the other. Husband's fortune and wife's cohere. They are not separate. So if you have to go to the forest, my place cannot be different." Sita, therefore, confidently asserted that not only her place was with Rama, but it would be her duty to lessen the hardships of her Rama. This was her *dharma*. Still out of compassion for her, he again detailed the vicissitudes of forest life. He pointed out that at every moment in forest, danger lurks around and life was not safe. Sita told him that without Rama, she would not live for a moment longer. For life without Rama was no life. As far as the point of her protection in forest was concerned, she said, her Rama was the protector of the world, then what of her?

In spite of all her entreaties and reasoned arguments, Rama could not make up his mind to allow her to follow him. Sita was in anger and blurted out : "My father would feel ashamed that he chose you as his son-in-law, a coward expressing inability to protect me." She had made her resolve to accompany Rama to the forest and when he persisted in his refusal to allow her to follow, she broke down and clung to him and sobbed aloud. She said she would not stay alive a moment longer without him. She knew, she said, that she was destined to stay in forest for some time, for that was the prediction made by the brahmanas while she was in her parents' house.

Seeing her steadfast resolve, Rama warmed up and held her by both his hands. He said tenderly : "My darling, you shall accompany me. None can stop you from doing that. We both shall live as ascetics engaged in severe austerities in forest."

Lakshmana was by Rama's side listening to this dialogue. He fell at his feet and held fast to them. He also declared that he would

accompany them and serve them both. Rama had to agree.

They then made preparations to leave for the forest. Lakshmana took leave of his mother and wife. Sita distributed all her belongings including her jewellery amongst the brahmins and the poor.

They then went to Kaikeyi's palace to take leave of the King who was there since he had entered it the day before. He was the ghost of his former self. Sumantra, the minister in waiting on him, sought permission of the King to allow them to enter his chamber and took them to him. Dasharatha had become a broken man. As soon as he saw Rama, he got up and rushed to embrace him. But he fell down on the way. Rama and Lakshmana gently lifted him and put him on the coach. —

When Dasharatha regained his composure a little, he passionately cried and requested Rama not to leave for forest but to seize the Kingdom by force. The situation then was such that it was not necessary for Rama to use any force. The kingdom was his for the asking. But Rama refused to oblige. He said : "Oh father! Give me your blessings for safe return. I shall go away now and honour my father's word"

Seeing that there was not even a faint hope of persuading Rama to wean him away from his resolve, the King ordered his commanders and ministers to make ready all the chariots to leave for the forest along with Rama. He wanted Rama's stay in forest as if it was a pleasant change from routine. Kaikeyi immediately sensed the danger. She glowered at the King and thundered : "That cannot be. When all leave with bag and baggage, over whom will my son rule? Let Rama, Lakshmana and Sita only go and that too in barkdress and live on what sylvan nature yields. Oh you deceitfull King! You cannot go back on your words and nullify whatever you have promised."

Rama again intervened and said with firm resolve : "I have no love for the Kingdom. My only regret is that this unpleasantness could have been avoided had anybody told me that Bharata wanted the Kingdom or that he should be crowned."

What a noble soul!

Kaikeyi behaved as one possessed with evil spirit. She made even Sita wear the bark-dress against the protestations of even the preceptor Vasishtha. The trio then took leave of Sumitra, Lakshmana's mother who was a woman with few words but of infinite courage. Amidst the cries and protestations of all the citizens, they ascended the chariot and left for the forest.

King Dasharatha then fell down moaning. He lamented helplessly and

moved on to Kausalya's apartments. He hated even the sight of Kaikeyi. He told everybody that he would soon die and if Bharata were to accept the crown, he should not perform his obsequies.

Then the minister Sumantra took the trio to the banks of the river Ganga. The chief of the region Guha coming to know of Rama's arrival, greeted him and requested him to spend the next fourteen years with him in comfort. But Rama had vowed to make his father's words true. He stayed with him for the night and left the next day morning for Bharadwaja's ashrama. The sage treated them affectionately as if they were his children and advised them to stay on the Chitrakuta hill. The hill was farther away from the Ashrama. They set out for it. On the way, they rejoiced themselves by feasting on the greenery and lavishness of the forest trees laden with the flowers and fruits. They reached the hill and constructed an ashrama there with their own hands. Lakshmana was a master craftsman. Sita a tender lady joyfully covered the distance in the company of Rama and Lakshmana. They started their happy life together in a hut surrounded by fruit and flower trees. Once settled, they remembered their father and mother and prayed God that He may make them happy.

IV

Rama's Exile

Was it a plot by Gods?

There is a theory propounded very ingeniously by scholars including Pandit Satavalekar. It was a plot of the gods to send Rama to forest through the machinations of Kaikeyi. In the forest, Ravana would abduct Sita. Rama would then go in search for her. Locating her in Lanka, he would attack Ravana, kill him and thus remove his menace to the sages and ordinary men living in the Dandakaranya forest.

In Valmiki's chapter 1-15, we get a remote hint. The Devas were being harassed by Ravana the Rakshasa King of Lanka. He had become puffed up with power acquired by him through the boon of God Brahma. The boon was that he would be invulnerable and invincible against the Devas, Asuras and Gandharvas. He had no fear of attacks from man, as he was sure that a mere man cannot do him any harm. When the Devas approached Brahma for protection against the attacks of Ravana, He told them to approach Lord Vishnu and request Him to intervene in the matter.

When Vishnu learnt about the Devas' grievance, He promised to be born to Dasharatha as one of his four sons and destroy Ravana. Dasharatha was then performing a Putra Kameshti Yajna - a sacrifice

performed with a desire to obtain a son. After the sacrifice the Goddess gave him *pāyasam* – a sweet dish as her *prasāda* – gift of her grace.

Dasharatha's three wives Kausālya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi divided it into three parts the major one being given to Kausalya. Kausalya out of love for Sumitra gave her some portion of it. Thus Rama was born to Kausalya, Lakshmana and Shatrughna to Sumitra and Bharata to Kaikeyi.

This is what Valmiki has stated in 1-15. But here there is no hint that Kaikeyi was to be made the instrument for the purpose.

We get another statement revealing the intention of the Gods (here we can interpret gods as leaders of men at different levels in the then Bharata Varsha) in 3-5-20 to 23. Indra, the Lord of the heavens, had come to the hermitage of the sage Sharabhanga in Dandaka-forest. Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana was proceeding to the same *ashrama* after they had left Chitrakuta mountain habitat of theirs. Indra saw them coming. He immediately left that *ashrama*. He said to the Gods : "Let Rama complete his mission of conquering Ravana-here. (Indra does not spell out as to whom Rama was supposed to conquer). He has to do the work which none else can do. I shall see him after that."

It looks that the leaders of men – the sages – were clearly thinking of removing the menace of Ravana. They must have also thought that Rama was the only person to accomplish that job. Rama was the only Kshatriya prince then, who had lifted that Shiva Dhanushya (bow kept at Janak's palace).

When, therefore, they met the sage Sharabhanga, the sage told them what Indra had said. Rama here assured them, that he would try to make them carefree by subduing the Rakshasas. He also noted that it was his father's command too, to conquer the Rakshasas in the forest.

But it has been always the mission of the Kshatriyas to protect the sages and common men from the harassment of the evil doers. We do not get the plan to make Kaikeyi behave in that uncommon and unbecoming way and force Rama to go into exile. Ordinarily on the invitation of the sages, he would have gone out into that conquering mission of the Rakshasas. For this purpose, the enactment of such a tragedy was quite unnecessary.

We get yet another statement of the sage Bharadvaja. He told Bharata when he had come there to take Rama back to Ayodhya : "Oh Bharata! do not blame Kaikeyi. Rama's exile would prove beneficial to the Devas, Danavas and the sages." (2-92-30, 31).

Lord Brahma himself is stated to have said : "कृतं कार्यं – Oh! our

work is done." (3-52-10 & 11) When Sita was being taken away forcibly by Ravana the sages were sad, yet they were also happy in a way. For they now felt that Ravana the main actor in that scheme of atrocities being perpetrated on the sages, would now be removed from the scene.

These statements appear to be an afterthought, when the tragedy of Rama's exile was an accomplished fact. These also excite the robust confidence of all the men of good will then, in the ability of Rama to overcome any difficulty that may crop up and finally destroy Ravana.

I, however, feel that there was no plot to instigate Kaikeyi's to do those heinous acts so that Rama would be exiled and the sages' desire to kill Ravana would thereby bear fruit. Rama and for that matter any other king would have planned action against these miscreants when approached by the sages.

Dasharatha's end : When Sumantra returned after seeing Rama off to further south from Guha's region and apprised Dasharatha of what had happened, the King became speechless with grief. Kausalya, Rama's mother, out of her grief became blind to the King's plight. She scolded him for his mindless action. Dasharatha's plight became indescribable. He folded his hands before Kausalya and begged her forgiveness. He was trapped in a situation not entirely of his own making. In his delirium, he remembered the sin he had committed while he was young.

He recounts his sin : He related it to Kausalya. He had mastered the skill of hitting the unseen target by sound only. This way he had killed an innocent young man by taking aim at a gurgling sound by his snake-sharp arrow. He felt that it was an elephant drinking water. But alas! It was not an elephant but a young man who had come to the river bank to fill his pitcher with water and take it to his aged and thirsty parents.

The young man was groaning with pain with that sharp arrow deep in his body. The young ascetic bade Dasharatha to take out the arrow from his body and take water to his aged parents. Nonplussed as he was at this unforeseen tragedy, he did as he was commanded by the young man. He took out the arrow from his body, and instantly the man died. He filled the pitcher with water and took it to his parents. They cursed him stating that he would meet with the same fate as they had. The King after relating the incident gave up all hope and died.

Kingdom with no King : The grief of his queens and his subjects knew no bounds. Yet it was all of no avail. The King's last rites could not be performed as both Rama and Lakshmana were away in the forest and Bharata and Shatrughna had been away at their maternal

uncle King Kaikeyi's palace.

When the learned men and other elderly people came to know about the death of the King, they opined :

"Kingdom without a King cannot survive. Let us immediately put somebody in his place. Otherwise Dharma will be in danger. There would be law-lessness. The married couples will break vows, parents will not be cared for. Terrorism will strike the land. Lands will not be cultivated. Grains will not be harvested. Man will exploit man. Springs of charity will dry up. The learned men will not be listened to with respect. Cruelty and misery will grow. King is essential." This was the considered opinion of all those who had assembled to mourn the death of their beloved King. Vasishtha advised them to wait. He sent for Bharata immediately. In the meanwhile, Dasharatha's body was kept immersed in oil to save it from decomposition.

Dasharatha as his name suggests was having complete control over all his senses. He had some weakness for Kaikeyi his youngest and the most beautiful wife. Yet it cannot be said that it was because of his unbridled sex desire that he married her or doted on her. Kaikeyi's thoughtless and cruel action in insisting on her pound of flesh, was an unexpected and unprovoked aberration even in her case. This act of hers, in sending Rama to the forest life for fourteen years, can only be ascribed to the quirk of cruel destiny. Otherwise her character was also blemishless. There are certain queer happenings in man's or nation's life, which defy all laws. Yet as the future events in Rama's life show, his exile was in fact a boon in disguise, as Brahma and other sages had opined.

For it paved the way for introducing a civilised way of life in South India and forging India into a culturally integrated nation. Since this hoary antiquity, India is known to the whole world as the land of Rama - the embodiment of all virtues.

Dasharatha was a worthy father of his illustrious sons. He was a hero of many battles. He was the staunch follower of Dharma with friends all over the then known world and no foes at all. He loved his sons very much. Amongst them again, he had special corner in his heart for Rama. Such a man under such strange circumstances had to agree to the exile of Rama the most virtuous and beloved son of his. Did Rama suffer for his strange notion of virtuousness? Would not have Lord Krishna's behaviour under the same circumstances been different? These ifs and whys are the imponderables of history. Let us leave these at what they are. Yet Rama's steadfastness to the principles he held dear carves a niche for him in our hearts for ever.

With the departure of Rama to the forest and Dasharatha discarding

his mortal coil, the city of Ayodhya, the land of splendour and plenty, looked desolate.

Bharata's arrival : Messengers were sent post-haste to fetch Bharata and Shatrughna who were then at Rajagriha far away in the West, the capital of the Kekaya King, Bharata's grand father. Bharata had bad dreams that day. He had deep love for his brother Rama and father Dasharatha. The tragedy enacted at Ayodhya had perhaps sent telepathic signals to him. When, therefore, the messengers from Ayodhya announced themselves in the morning and conveyed to them the Ayodhya priests' and ministers' message to return at once to Ayodhya, Bharata had an uneasy premonition of things to come. But the messengers, the envoys of Ayodhya, diplomatically replied to Bharata's searching enquiries about the welfare of all his near and dear ones, by stating : "Oh, tiger among men! All whose welfare is dear to you, are well. Lakshmi the goddess of sovereignty, awaits to woo you. Get into the chariot without loss of any time." Bharata was puzzled at this enigmatic message. But instructed as the envoys were not to disclose the details of the tragic events that had overtaken Ayodhya, Bharata and Shatrughna took leave of their grand-father and maternal uncle, mounted their chariots and reached Ayodhya on the morning of the eighth day. The modern Iran was then known as Kekaya. In Valmiki Ramayana it is stated that these brothers had to cross a river near the city named *Ailadhana* (2-71-3). The city is mentioned immediately after they had crossed the river Shatudri - modern Sutluj. Ail is derived from Ila the daughter of Manu and the sister of Ikshwaku who had founded the sun line dynasty. Manu was the first King of mankind. She was the ruler maybe of Ilan-Iran- the country named after her.

When they entered the city, it bore a mournful look. Their anxieties grew. But Kaikeyi was looking forward to welcome her beloved son Bharata with pomp and honour due to a King. When, therefore, Bharata entered Kaikeyi's palace unannounced in expectation to meet his father, to his surprise the King was not to be found there. Instead he saw Kaikeyi alone, seated on a golden coach. As soon as Kaikeyi saw her son entering her apartment, she rushed forward and embraced him. Bharata touched her feet and asked her the first question : "Oh, dear mother! Where is the father? Why does the city bear such a deserted look?" Kaikeyi without any qualms of conscience replied : "Oh dear one! The great King, your father, has gone the way all the mortals have to go sooner or later."

At these words, overcome by grief, he fell on the ground. Then recovering his senses, he asked her about Rama and others. To these questions, with joy overflowing from her face, Kaikeyi replied : "Rama dressed in bark has gone to the forest along with Lakshmana and Sita." These words of hers fell on the ears of Bharata as a bolt

from the blue. Puzzled beyond words, he asked her again : "What terrible sin has Rama committed that he has been banished thus to the forest? Has he caused any bodily hurt to any innocent person or desired anybody else's wife?"

These were the worst crimes which would visit even a prince with such dire punishment. Kaikeyi had now to tell him the truth. She did say : "Rama did commit no crime."

Bharata, the noble follower of Dharma : Bharata now realised the magnitude of the infamy his mother had brought on her and him. He questioned his worldly-wise mother of the impropriety of her demand to crown a younger brother in the place of the elder. Rama was nobility incarnate. His love for Rama was unparalleled. He would not like to cross the limits of law and tradition even by an inch. He therefore flatly refused to be crowned King in the place of Rama. He vowed to go to the forest and to bring Rama back and make him the King. He heaped abuses on his mother and used choicest words. He called her "Murderess of her husband - A Rakshasi!" And cursed her with words, "Kaikeyi! Go to hell!" He bluntly told her that the only person who deserved to be banished to the forest was herself alone. "The best course for her" he said, "is to enter fire or hang herself."

Unable to bear the grief at the death of his loving father and the banishment of his dearly loved brother, Bharata now rushed to the apartment of Kausalya just when she along with Sumitra was coming out to meet him. Seeing Bharata and Shatrughna with eyes full of tears and beside himself with grief, they themselves stricken with unimaginable grief, somehow controlled themselves and begged of him to take them to the forest where Rama was forced to lead the life of an ascetic.

This request of Kausalya and Sumitra pierced the heart of Bharata further. He felt that he had been showered with thousands of sharp needles. Bharata could not bear the pangs of sorrow at what had happened. He fell into a swoon. Somehow he got up and with piteous words, he said : "Mother, don't you know that I am completely innocent in the matter? My love for Rama knows no bounds. Let thousands of sins visit me if I am privy to this dastardly act of my mother." Kausalya knew the innocence of Bharata, yet she had felt that with the temptation of gaining the crown, Bharata might deviate from the path of Dharma. Seeing the inconsolable grief of Bharata she put him on her lap and caressed him tenderly. She felt as if her Rama had returned from the forest and she was enjoying the bliss of his presence.

Kaikeyi's dreams shattered : Kaikeyi's dreams were shattered at this fell stroke. Her castles in the air blew off in smoke. She was then

the most hapless lady in the realm. In the most abject condition, she and her maid Manthara shut themselves up in their apartment, to avoid the sneering gaze and loose and venomous words of all those around.

With all what had happened, Vasishta, the preceptor of the King, could not keep silence. He had to arrange the coronation of Bharata, for the throne could not be kept vacant. He called Bharata to his hermitage and pointed out the immediate duties that Bharata had to perform. He told him to perform the last rites of his father and occupy the throne, for the vacant throne would invite danger to the Kingdom.

But Bharata swore before the teacher and the assembly of the sages and the elders of the realm that he would not occupy the throne even temporarily. He said he would bring Rama from the forest and enthrone him. Seeing him adamant, all agreed to Bharata's proposal which was also what they desired.

The obsequies of the departed soul were duly performed. Immediate arrangements to start to the forest to bring back Rama were made. They all, Bharata, Shatrughna, Kausalya, Sumitra, the ministers and others started for the forest with a large army. With this turn of events Kaikeyi, the cause of all this tragedy, also felt repentant and she was also allowed to accompany them all. Vasishta of course was there to tender appropriate advice as occasion needed.

Guha's suspicions : When they arrived at the bank of the river Ganga, Guha, the hunter King, noticing the huge army developed a suspicion about Bharata's intentions. He, however, offered customary welcome to Bharata and politely enquired of him whether he had any hostile intentions against Rama. Bharata was instantly touched to the quick and his sorrow increased. Yet he had to control himself and assure Guha of his intention to bring Rama back and to crown him King of Ayodhya.

Can we find a purer soul other than that of Bharata in the whole literature of the world? I am aware that there are Rama, Krishna and others besides Bharata, who are equally jewels amongst men. But a brother like Bharata, I believe, is the only one in the annals of history, the brother who spurns even the Goddess Lakshmi in the form of a crown of an Emperor, for love for his brother. And mark well! All these personalities as portrayed by Valmiki are human beings and no more. None is portrayed here as divine as has been done later. Such men like Bharata, Shatrughna, Lakshmana and Rama have, the Indians believe and the history avers, actually in ancient days strode this mother earth as men in flesh and blood. How blessed is this land of Bharata where such men are born and are honoured!

Thus assured, Guha the hunter King entertained Bharata with all

the sages, the ministers and the others in his retinue. Guha then arranged for the boats to ferry the whole of the army across the river. Special arrangements were made to transport Bharata and the other members of the Royal household and the sages. Their destination was Bharadwaja's ashrama. Guha accompanied them to guide them on the way.

Bharadwaja consoles Bharata : When they reached the ashrama, Bharadwaja noticing the sage Vasishtha, came forward and washed his feet. He then enquired of Bharata concerning his welfare. Rama with Lakshmana and Sita had already had the hospitality of the sage Bharadwaja, on his way to Chitrakuta where Rama had established his hermitage. Bharadwaja knew all the events that had taken place at Ayodhya. He, however, discreetly refrained from referring to those events. He had also his own suspicions about Bharata's intentions in proceeding to meet Rama in the forest. When Bharata was questioned about these by Bharadwaja, he was very much pained. He had, however, to bear all these words piercing his heart; he humbly fell at the feet of the sage and told him that death was better for him than his present state.

He said with intense agony in his heart : "Do you, master, suspect me? I do not want the Kingdom. I want to be Rama's slave all my life." When Bharadwaja heard these words uttered with utmost humility and sincerity, he consoled Bharata with the words : "Oh, scion of the Raghu-race! I know you are very pure in your heart. I just wanted to draw out from you these words so that your glory will increase hundred-fold. Do not grieve. Stay here for a day and leave tomorrow, for meeting Rama who is on the Chitrakuta hill, some distance from here."

Bharata, pleased with these nectarlike words, coming from the mouth of the sage, did not want to further trouble the sage. He felt that he with his army would be an unbearable burden for the poorly equipped sage. But the sage insisted and Bharata agreed. The feast arranged by the sage was so sumptuous that even the mighty emperors could envy it. It was modelled on the sage Vasistha's feast to the King Vishwamitra and his thousands of army men. The retinue of Bharata was highly pleased and had no mind to leave the sage's ashrama. But such blessings come once in a blue moon. Nay! Not even then! They come when the sages like Vasistha or Bharadwaja are around and when Kings like Rama or Bharata rule. They come when such sages feel inclined to spring a miracle.

The next day, Bharata bade adieu to sage Bharadwaja who told Bharata not to abuse or neglect Kaikeyi for what she had done. The sage said : "All what has happened is good for the world."

Bharata meets Rama : As per the directions of the sage, Bharata



took to the forest path leading to the Chitrakoota hill. Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana had constructed the hermitage with skill. Lakshmana was an expert in architecture. The hermitage was built not far from the north bank of the river Mandakini. Daily Rama used to take his two companions to some beautiful spot or other and describe the beauty of nature surrounding them. Rama and Lakshmana appeared to have thorough knowledge of the forest trees. Sita was also taking active interest in all what this wonderful duo said or did. They were passing their lives very happily in the midst of the grandeur of mountain scenery feeding themselves on the roots and fruits and listening, the sweet songs and watching the dance and play of the birds around. They felt, the heaven could not be a more beautiful place than this.

When Bharata and his entourage sighted the hill from afar, he got down from his chariot and accompanied by Shatrughna, they started on foot to meet his beloved Rama. The large army halted a little further away. However, the din and noise of the army in complete formation with chariots, elephants, horses, footsoldiers made a tremendous disturbance. The forest animals out of fear began running wildly hither and thither. The noise reached the ears of Rama. He asked Lakshmana to find out the source. "Is it some tiger or other fierce beast that has come rummaging? Let us be prepared to meet the situation."

Lakshmana looked around and sighted the army. He told Rama that some King was approaching with flags flying. Then he saw Bharata at a distance. His heart was filled with anger. He felt Bharata was aiming to do away with his rivals for the throne. He angrily conveyed the information to Rama. But Rama cautioned him to be quiet. He said that Bharata knew the Dharma and so he was coming to take him back. He added : "Don't talk ill of Bharata." Lakshmana then felt that perhaps their father was coming to take them back. But he saw that Dasharatha's white umbrella was not seen anywhere.

While they were having their guessing game, Bharata saw Rama near the altar with matted locks and deerskin seat, dressed in bark and leaves. Out of pure love surging in him, he rushed forward and fell at the feet of Rama with the only word 'brother' coming out of him.

After a while Rama lifted Bharata up, embraced him and asked him : "How is father? What made you leave him and come to meet me? How are the affairs of the Kingdom going on?" and so on.

With tears in his eyes, Bharata told Rama : "Oh, my dearest brother! Father has departed for heaven, crying hoarse over your departure to the forest. My mother has perpetrated the most heinous crime in sending you, a totally innocent and noble one, to the forest. This Kingdom is yours and I don't want it. Return, oh my beloved brother! Return and occupy your throne. I shall be your slave." So saying

Bharata clasped Rama's feet and washed them with his tears.

Rama also could not bear the grief at the loss of his father. Yet he had to control himself and console his weeping brothers and disconsolate Sita, his wife. He said : "Rise oh, innocent one! You are not at all at fault, nor is your mother to be blamed. How can I return now and render the command of my father and mother meaningless? Your duty bids you to sit on the throne and protect and strive for the welfare of your subjects. Take heart and return."

Rama then along with all the assembled persons offered libations for the peace of the departed soul on the bank of Mandakini river and returned to his hermitage. Seeing the four princes and the three queens together, the assembled gathering gave out chorus of joy. Rama then announced to the gathering his unalterable decision not to return. He told Bharata firmly not to set at nought their father's wishes under whatever coercion they were expressed. One of the sages Jabali urged Rama to enjoy the Kingdom which was his by right. He should not worry as his father was no more there. Rama became very angry that a sage should have given vent to such unrighteous feelings. Rama sharply rebuked him by stating that his materialist talk was unbecoming to him and that he should not have a place in the assembly of the sages of the realm. However, after Vasistha's intervention that unhappy episode came to an end.

Vasistha then pleaded with Rama to grant the request of Bharata and return to Ayodhya. But Rama was firm. Then Bharata sat on the grass and vowed to fast unto death. Rama pointed out, that was not the Dharma of the Kshatriyas. Bharata then said, "Why should you the innocent one suffer for my mother's whim? I shall spend fourteen years in the forest and you will return." Rama laughed and said : 'My child, this is not a trade or barter'. When Vasistha found that both brothers would not resile a bit from their positions, he proposed that Bharata should rule as Rama's deputy, for the throne cannot be kept vacant. Rama accepted the suggestion of the wise sage and took Bharata on his lap and requested Bharata to accept his Kingdom as a gift and rule for fourteen years.

Bharata accepted the suggestion on condition that he would keep Rama's sandals on the throne and himself stay in a hut on the banks of the river Sharayu till Rama's return. If he were not to return on the appointed day he would immolate himself. The condition was agreed to by Rama.

Bharata then returned with all the retinue and established himself at Nandigram on the banks of Sharayu and ruled from there, taking it as his Dharma-duty. He placed Rama's sandals on the consecrated day and covered them with a royal canopy. He however lived there

as an ascetic dressed in bark clothes and with locks matted.

Rama leaves Chitrakuta : After Bharata and his mothers left for Ayodhya, Rama felt a little dejected at the thought of the plight of his old and widowed mother. The sad disappointment writ large on his brother Bharata's face also made him disconsolate. The sages around were also not happy as the Rakshasas were often harassing them. Khara, the brother of Ravana the mighty King of Lanka, was in charge of Janasthana his farthest outpost in the north. Khara was making the life of the sages there unbearable by constant depredations. Rama therefore left Chitrakuta, in search of another place.

A little further away lay the hermitage of the sage Atri. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana went and stayed with Atri and his family. Anasuya, the wife of Atri, was very much pleased with the courage and demeanour of Sita. She blessed her with the words : "Oh, Maithili, you are the jewel among women. May you shine with glory with your ideal of womanhood." In consultation with Atri, they proceeded south. In the dense forest, they saw a huge figure like a hill approaching them. It was demon Viradha. He pounced on Sita and lifted her up. Rama felt bewildered. But Lakshmana hissing like an angry snake rushed forward sending a shower of arrows against him. Viradha's body was invulnerable. He lifted both Rama and Lakshmana and putting them both on his shoulders ran away deep into the forest, keeping Sita behind. Now Sita became terribly afraid. Rama and Lakshmana finding that Viradha's body could not be pierced with arrows, nor with spears and swords, wrenched off his two arms and threw them down. The demon fell on the ground and Rama danced on his chest. Then he planted his foot on his neck and flushed out life from his body. Yet he showed signs of recovery. They then dug out a pit and put the Rakhasa in it covering him with earth.

It is stated by Valmiki that the demon was an accursed Gandharva. Here, for the first time, Rama and his companions had the bitter experience of forest life. And he said so. "Oh! how terrible is the life in the forest! And we are not accustomed to it." Rama and Lakshmana rejoined Sita and proceeded to the *ashrama* of the sage Śarabhaṅga. They found the sage holding his life only to bless Rama and Lakshmana for what they had been doing for the protection of the sages who had been introducing Vedic culture in the different regions of the Dandaka forest. The uncivilised foresters belonged to the Rakshasa culture in which man-eating was not a taboo. It was Rama's mission to clear the forest of these demonic elements and to make it a safe place for the civilised Vedic people to dwell and to introduce cultivation. All the sages in that forest hearing the news of Viradha's death came and blessed the two brothers. So long as Viradha was alive, nobody could hope to live there.

Thereafter this trio reached the ashrama of the sage Suteekshna. At the request of this sage, Rama and Lakshmana cleared that region infested with wild animals, and made it safe for the stay of the sages around.

Sita had now found that their stay in the forest was becoming riskier than ever. Instead of the hermit's life they were supposed to live, they had then assumed the role of a King and protector of the hermits. The Rakshasas naturally became apprehensive of the prowess of these brothers, particularly after the death of the demon Viradha. Sita now expected more and more such attacks. She therefore entreated Rama not to risk his life anymore. Rama pleaded with her : "We are Kshatriyas and carry the weapons with us. When these helpless sages seek our protection, can we refuse?" Sita agreed.

Rama and Lakshmana assured the sages of protection and cleared the forest of evil-doers. The sages were happy. They also were happy and thus passed ten more years in the company of the ascetics amidst indescribably beautiful forest surroundings. The deer, the elephants, bison, boars, the birds, the trees and the creepers with multicoloured flowers were their companions. The water lilies, the ponds, the rivers and the hills and the dales were their pleasure spots.

Visit to Agastya-Ashrama : They had heard of the great sage Agastya the patron saint of the Dakshinapatha – the south India. He was famous all over India. He was perhaps the first great Vedic sage to cross the Vindhya mountains and establish rapport with the people of the South. There is a mythological story that when all the sages had been to the Kailasa mountains in the Himalayas to attend the marriage ceremony of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, Agastya alone remained in South India. It is stated that by his presence in the South, the balance between the northern and southern hemisphere of the earth was maintained. The significance of the story is that the glory of the South India became equal in value to that of the North with the tremendous amount of work that this sage had done for the welfare of the Southern inhabitants. It means that the southerners were won over to the Vedic civilisation by the peaceful, persuasive and unstinted efforts of the couple Agastya and his wife Lopamudra, the daughter of a Kshatriya King. Agastya was the brother of the famous sage Vasishtha.

When the Vedic sages spread all over the South, under the leadership of Agastya, they had to face many hurdles; particularly the rulers who are termed as demons-rakshasas in the epic, were required to be either won over to the Vedic ways or be liquidated. With the meagre number of workers with Agastya, the use of military means was out of question. He and his colleagues and coworkers had to employ all sorts of persuasive means at their command. The episode of the two demons Vatapi and

Ilvala points to the success of Agastya's methods.

Vatapi and Ilvala : These two brothers were giving lot of trouble to the Vedic sages who were working in the South. They appear to be the priests of the old ways of the South. I shall first narrate the story as related by Valmiki.

Of the two, Ilvala donned the clothes a Brahmin priest usually wore and would approach the sages to attend the ceremony in honour of the manes and partake of the food prepared for the occasion. It was customary not to refuse such an invitation. When somebody would attend, he would be served as food the human flesh by cutting Vatapi the other brother into pieces. It is asserted that Vatapi had the boon that no matter into how many pieces his body was cut up, the pieces would reunite and he would be his former self hale and hearty. Vatapi would assume the form of a goat. Ilvala would cut the goat into pieces, cook these and serve these as meat to the unsuspecting brahmins. After the meal was taken, he would ask the brahmins, whether they were satisfied. When they would answer in the affirmative, Ilvala would then give a call : "Vatapi, please come out." Reunited into life Vatapi would then come tearing the bowels of the guests. Thus many sages were killed by these two demons.

The facts can be reconstructed thus : When the Vedic sages began spreading to the south trying to preach their message of good and contented family life, the local uncivilised demons would kill them by various means, sometimes by direct fights and sometimes through tricks like calling them for feasts and poisoning them. Even some of the demons had learned Sanskrit language. Ilvala could speak in fluent and chaste Sanskrit. Agastya was thus invited to the feast by Ilvala and Vatapi. It is clear from the story that Agastya had come to know of the trick, of these brothers moving about as brahmins. When Agastya was invited and thus fed, he said : "I have digested Vatapi." Ilvala's trick thus failed and Vatapi no more could kill the sages. Agastya had converted these two brothers to his point of view. They had then digested the Vedic lore and had themselves become preachers of the Vedic way of life.

Agastya thus had brought about a revolution in the south. By his indefatigable and imaginative efforts, he had won over the different types of people in the South to his ways. Such a peaceful revolution is unheard of and unparalleled in the annals of world history. The Vedics had done it. The Rakshasas were won over to the Vedic way of integral vision of life.

Vindhya Subdued : Agasti or Agastya is also known for his subduing the Vindhya mountains. Nobody from North had ever crossed these sprawling mountains dividing India into two halves the northern known

as Aryavarta and the southern as Dakshinapatha. He penetrated deep into south reaching as far as Kanyakumari. Many episodes connected with Agastya are symbolic. They show his remarkable achievements. Before him nobody dared to cross the Vindhya. So the story is woven round Agastya's first feat to cross these formidable ranges. The Vindhya, finding this venerable sage standing before it, bent low to pay its homage to him. The sage blessed it saying : "May you ever remain thus till I return." The sage did not return and the mountain became subdued and passable forever.

Ocean discovered : Another story is that of the two brothers narrated above. The third is about his feat of drinking the sea. He appears to be the first ever Vedic man from the north to roam about the whole of the south and explore it. He reached the farthest end of it, and dipped his fingers in the waters of the ocean. This symbolic act of dipping his fingers in the waters of the ocean, is turned into an imaginative story of subduing even the mighty ocean.

We do not have a detailed history of the regions east of the river Ganga or of the Dakshinapatha in the Rigveda. It appears that after the Dasharajna war, Sudasa firmly established himself in the regions known as modern Punjab and Haryana. The Vedic people spread to the East. Agastya pioneered the efforts of the Vedics to spread all over the South. Before the entry of the Vedics into these regions, there were people known as Rakshasas. They appear to have done little cultivation and mostly lived on fruits, roots and the meat of the animals. They had also no inhibitions about eating human flesh as the story of Ilvala and Vatapi reveals. With the entry of Agastya into south, the Vedics appeared to have spread rapidly and made herculean efforts to spread the knowledge of Sanskrit and the literature in it, namely the Vedas. The Tamil Sangam literature notes *Aindrya* and *Agastyan* grammars. This indicates that the structure of the Southern languages particularly Tamil, Telgu and Kannada has been much influenced by the Sanskrit grammar. Sanskrit as far as can be seen, is the oldest extant language and we do not know of any other language which might have existed prior to it particularly in the north India. In the South, however, there is a distinct possibility of some language akin to Tamil existing prior to the introduction of Sanskrit in the South by the sage Agastya. It is particularly noted in the Ilvala episode that he had learnt Sanskrit from the sages. This would show his mother tongue to be different from Sanskrit.

Ramayana being the oldest epic available, it gives a lot of information about the life in India earlier to the Vedic way of life. Rakshasa was the collective name given to the civilisation in which the earlier people of the south were bred and brought up. We have here noted the difference in languages and ways of living. The Rakshasas were mostly

living by fruits, roots and meat of the animals hunted. They do not appear to live in houses built with mud and stone. They appear to live in mountain caves. We shall discuss these points of and on as the story progresses.

Rama gets weapons from Agastya : Rama had heard of the great sage Agastya and was very eagerly looking forward to his meeting with this venerable, old and unique personality. When he entered the region where that sage's *ashram* was situated, he immediately noticed the difference. This region was very well planned. It had rows of fruit-bearing trees and abundance of sweet-smelling flowers. The birds and animals around looked happily moving about without any sort of fear. Rama first sent Lakshmana to the younger brother of the sage, and through him announced his arrival.

Agastya, it appeared, had learnt in advance about banishment of Rama to the forest. He was in touch with the movements of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. He was also expecting to meet Rama and learn about his future plans. When, therefore, the message of arrival of Rama into the *ashrama* precincts was conveyed to Agastya, he came forward to welcome him and Sita and Lakshmana. Under the sage's directions, their stay was very comfortable. The sage entreated them to pass the rest of their forest stay comfortably and in peace in his *Ashrama*. But Rama stated that he had assured the sages their protection from the attacks of the Rakshasas and so could not accept the sage's invitation to stay at the *ashrama*.

Sensing that Rama would need very many weapons to protect the sages and others in the forest, the sage Agastya presented Rama with a marvellous bow and an inexhaustible quiver as well as a sword. When enquired of the proper place for their stay in the Dandaka forest, the sage advised him to establish it on the bank of the river Godavari near Panchavati. The sage described the place as a very beautiful one with abundance of fruits and roots.

At Panchavati : With the blessings of the sage and with the newly acquired weapons, the trio arrived at Panchavati, on the banks of the river Godavari in Janasthana, the region around Nasik in northern Maharashtra. On their way they met a huge vulture-bird perched on a big tree. His name was Jatayu and he along with his brother Sampati were the sons of Aruna the dawn-God who was in turn brother of Garuda the Vehicle of the Lord Vishnu. Jatayu told Rama that he was a friend of Dasharatha. Rama felt immensely happy at acquiring a very strong and reliable family friend. Lakshmana the expert in architecture chose a commanding spot-amidst beautiful flower trees with sweetly singing birds having their nests in them. He erected there a very commodious and comfortable ashrama for their stay. Lakshmana

had used mud and local materials for the purpose. He had the training in this art.

Vulture-bird : Hereafter we are going to come across these Vultures, Vanaras (monkeys), bears and others. These groups are not in fact the animals, the symbols of which they flaunt and represent as if they are these animals. Their whole behaviour is like a human being. Hanuman the Vanara (monkey) minister of Sugriva the Vanara king, had mastery over the Sanskrit language. He has been described as the most learned amongst the learned. He was an intellectual giant. So all these groups though described as Vanaras, Vultures etc., they were all human beings. These different groups used these animals or birds as their symbols to distinguish themselves from others. They wore such masks also while moving about; the Vanara (monkey) tail mark, or Vulture-bird wing mark enabled them to jump high up or fly about.

They were passing their days very happily there. They were looking forward to returning to Ayodhya and reuniting with their loving brothers Bharata and Shatrughna. One day while they were having a wistful talk of old days and tales of long ago, a young woman came and accosted them. Her name was Shurpanakha.

Shurpanakha episode : Seeing the handsome figure of Rama she developed a longing to have him as her husband. She told them that this land belonged to the Rakshasas with Ravana her brother as the Emperor. Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana were also her brothers and they were very brave. This region was then under the control of Khara and Dushana who were also her brothers. But she boasted that she was not under anybody's control. She was free to roam and do what she liked.

When that Rakshasi approached Rama and began pestering him to marry her, Rama in a jocular vein told her that he was there with his wife and she should better approach Lakshmana with her proposal. Not understanding the meaning of the words, she turned to Lakshmana and entreated him to be her husband. Lakshmana told her again in a humorous tone : "Oh, beautiful lady, Rama is my master and I am his slave. You are the sister of an Emperor; please be after him." It is clear that they had taken the overtures of that wandering woman very lightly. They could not think a young woman, and that too a sister of an Emperor, would move about so freely begging men to be with her.

She again rushed to Rama and feeling that Sita is the hurdle between her and her desire to marry Rama, she sprang on Sita. The farce was turning into a tragedy. Rama saved Sita and Lakshmana drew out his sword. In the fight that ensued between them Lakshmana cut her nose and ear. In the same condition she rushed to her brother Khara and related all what had happened. She exhorted Khara to take

revenge of the wrong done to her. She said : "How these strangers can roam about in your domain and, with impunity, do me wrong?" Khara got wild at the discomfiture of Shurpanakha. He ordered his generals to attack these strangers, slay them and bring their lifeless bodies, with the woman alive.

Till then, Rama had to fight the local Rakshasa chieftains and protect the sages from their attacks. With Khara's entry in the field of battle, the character of the fight got a new dimension. Rama had now on to fight with the representatives of the organised empire of the Rakshasas. Khara the governor of Janasthana sent his fourteen Rakshasa generals against Rama. Seeing this organised attack, Rama asked Lakshmana to remain in the *ashrama* and guard Sita. He would see to it that this attack was repulsed.

Rama before the attack, according to the rules of war, asked the fourteen Rakshasa leaders the reasons for their organised attack with such huge strength. He on his part had taken the vow to protect the sages and the ascetics in the region. The Rakshasas stated that the region was under the domain of their master Khara and under his commend they were asking them to clear off the region. As the Rakshasas did not want peace, Rama with his prowess killed all the fourteen generals. It should be noted that these Rakshasas had not the weapons as developed as Rama. They mostly used stones, boulders, rocks and trees. They also used bows and arrows, but they were not adept in the use of them. Rama's skill and speed in the use of different types of bows and arrows could not be matched by the Rakshasas. Rama also knew Mantrashastra and its use in getting a desired weapon.

When this terrible news reached Khara and Dushana the governors of the region, they arrived in massive strength to Subdue Rama. But Rama was so adept in the use of his weapons that he could kill all these attackers with his strong bow and inexhaustible quiver gifted to him by the sage Agastya. Naturally the inmates of Janasthana as the region was known then were very happy. The atrocious rule of the Rakshasas was over and for all time, with the presence of this mighty hero. They felt as if Lord Vishnu himself had descended to earth to protect their way of living.

The news of the defeat of the Rakshasa generals together with their governors soon spread like wild fire all over South. One Akampana from amongst the Rakshasas escaped and ran straight to Ravana the Emperor with his capital at Lanka, and narrated the total rout of his army stationed in Janasthana.

Ravana : Valmiki in Uttarakanda chapter 3 and 4 gives the origin of the Rakshasas. Pulastya a Brahmarshi, a very learned sage having perfect knowledge of Brahman, was the son of the creator Brahmā.

The sage Marichi was his brother. Kashyap Prajapati was son of Marichi. He had two wives—Diti and Aditi. From Aditi he got twelve sons who, because of the uncommon spiritual endowments, were called the Devas. Diti's sons were called Daityas. Hiranyakashipu was her son. Pralhada the famous devotee of the Lord Vishnu was Hiranyakashipu's son. His son Bali was a good King, but was inclined towards materialism and had developed dictatorial tendencies. The Devas did not like this attitude. They through Vamana, their dwarfish leader, drove him away to Patal, possibly the present south American continent.

Diti's younger sister was named Danu. These were daughters of Daksha another Prajapati. Danu had forty sons. They were called Danavas. Her another sister was named Danayu. Her sons were called Asuras. They were so called for they did not accept Varuni – a sort of intoxicating drink (wine or sura) produced through the churning of the ocean. Devas accepted this wine—sura. So they were called Suras.

Kālā was another daughter of Daksha. Her sons were called Kalakanja (कालकंज वै नामासुरा आसन् – तै.ब्रा. १-१२ – *Kālkanja vai nāmāsura āsana*) Thus Daityas, Danavas and Asuras who were not drinking wine came closer. When Bali was driven to Patala, the other side of the Globe, these Asuras and Danavas accompanied Bali. They developed there seven good colonies, named Sutala, Atala, Patala, Talatala Mahitala, Rasatala and Vitala. They called their original land *Mahitala*. (see Home of the Vedic People – Chapter in our Vol.I. see also Valmiki's I-45).

Those Daityas who did not accompany Bali told the Devas that they would protect (*Rakshāmah*) the land from foreign attacks. They were called Rakshasas, (See Valmiki – VII-4)

The first two Rakshasa leaders were Heti and Prahēti. Heti married the daughter of Kalabhaya (Asura noble), named Bhayā or Mayā. (Bhaya means fear. But here Heti and his son from Bhaya are described as 'The Great'). Heti's son was Vidyutakesha whose wife was Salakantaka. She was a very sensual woman. She left her son Sukesha in the forest. Sukesha's cries were heard by Parvati, Lord Shankara's spouse. Sukesha was brought up by Parvati.

Sukesha then married Devavati the virtuous daughter of a Gandharva named Gamani. His name suggests that he was a republican leader of a few villages. From her Sukesha got three very brave sons Malyavana, Sumali and Mali. They practised severe penance. They obtained a boon from Lord Brahma and became fearless. They then perpetrated atrocities on the people around. Instead of protecting (*rakshāmah*) the people, they became marauders. So the rakshasas' original connotation of 'protectors' was changed to 'marauders'. They requested the architect of the Devas by name Vishvakarma, to build a beautiful city on the mounts Trikuta and Suvcla near the Southern sea. Its name was Lanka.

When their atrocities on innocent people and the sages became unbearable the Devas under the leadership of Vishnu drove away these three brothers, Malyavan, Sumali and Mali, from their abode in Lanka.

Sumali's sons were Prahasta, Akampana, Dhumraksha, and others. These became Ravana's ministers and generals. Mali's sons were Anala, Anila, Hara and Sampati. They were Vibhishana's ministers. And Vajramushti, Virupaksha and Durmukha were the sons of Malyavana.

When these three great Rakshasas were defeated and had to leave Lanka, Vaishravana (Kubera, the Lord of the Yakshas and master of unlimited wealth), the son of the sage Vishrava from his wife Devavarnini the daughter of sage Bharadvaja, occupied Lanka. Vishrava was the son of the sage Pulastya, the brother of the sage Marichi. Vaishravana-Kubera also built a plane called Pushpaka.

Sumali wanted to regain control over Lanka. He was looking for an opportunity. He took his young daughter Kaikasi to Lanka and told her to lure the sage Vishrava to marry her, as he was the proper husband for her. She accepted her father's proposal and came to the place where Vishrava was practising penance. After a while when Vishrava finished his evening ablutions, he saw this beautiful girl with her face cast downwards. The sage just enquired of her as to who she was and why she had come there? She told her family background and said : "Oh sage! the rest you can divine."

She married him at an awkward time. The sage said that because of her choice of improper time, she would get brave but cruel and vicious sons. She begged him to give her a good son. He granted her request. She got Ravana and Kumbhakarna the two vicious sons. The last good son was Vibhishana.

Ravana had his neck ten times bigger than ordinary. He was therefore called Dashagriva. Kumbhakarna was also a very mighty one. Vibhishana was a pious son.

One day Vaishravana the King of Lanka came to pay his homage to his father Vishrava. When Kaikasi saw his incomparable splendour and glory, she asked Ravana to be as great as his step-brother Vaishravana (Kubera).

All these three sons of Kaikasi practised penance. They were all virtuous in their behaviour. Ravana was exceptional amongst them. He, after severe austerities, obtained boons from Lord Brahmā. Ravana wanted to be immortal with his current body. Brahma told him that was an impossible feat for those born in this mortal world. He then prayed Brahmā to grant him immunity from death at the hands of the Daityas, Danavas, Asuras, Devas and Rakshasas i.e. from all those living beings except men. For he considered men to be insignificant and weak.

In the austerities practised by Ravana he had cut off his ten necks and had offered as oblations to God Fire. Lord Brahmā also granted him the boon to be his former self.

When Sumali heard of the strength gained by his grandson Ravana, he decided to attack Lanka again. He returned from his abode in Sutala, with his ministers and generals named Prahasta, Maricha, Virupaksha and Mahodara. He instigated Ravana to attack Vaishravana his brother and seize Lanka. Ravana was very virtuous till then. He told his grandfather Sumali, that as Vaishravana was his elder brother who was like his father, how could he attack him?

Sumali brushed aside his arguments. He said : "For the brave, there is no brother. Even in the days of yore, the Daityas and the Devas, both sons of Prajapati Kashyapa, had fought amongst them and the Devas had won. This Lanka belonged to us Rakshasas and we have to become masters here again." Sumali conveniently forgot that the Devas had subdued Hiranyakashipu their brother born of Diti, for his misdeeds and atrocities on the people. He could have said : "Oh Ravana! The King's foremost duty is to protect Dharma—righteousness—as well as his subjects from attack. In so doing, he has not to consider whether such a foe of the people is his brother or father." But Sumali's logic was perverse. He had used it for his selfish ends to be the unbridled master over his former land from which he was driven out for his atrocities on his people. Ravana's name was Dashagreeva But he was called Ravana for unruly and riotous behaviour.

He thought over his grand father's words and approached his father who advised him not to pick up a quarrel with his elder brother. Ravana did not like this sane counsel. He sent his minister Prahasta to his brother to hand over possession of Lanka to the Rakshasas. Vaishravana sent a word that Lanka belongs to all of them and so there should be no quarrel over that issue. But Ravana would not relent. Vaishravana, therefore met his father who advised him to hand over Lanka to Ravana and he should proceed to the Himalayan regions to avoid fratricidal quarrel.

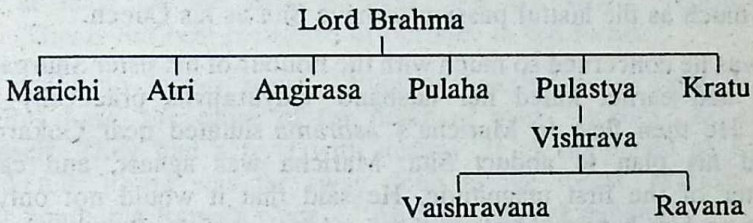
Ravana then married Mandodari, the daughter of the Rakshasa architect Maya and Hema an apsara—a very beautiful woman. Mandodari was a very virtuous and pious lady. Indrajita was her son from Ravana.

Ravana, thereafter, became very atrocious. No beautiful woman was safe from his molestations. One day, while he was on the—mission of conquering the world, he came across Vedavati the daughter of Brahmarshi Kushadhvaja, the son of the Guru of the gods Brihaspati. She was engaged in austerities and observing certain vows to get her desire to marry Lord Vishnu, fulfilled. Ravana boasted that he had conquered all the gods and that there was none greater than him in the then known

world. Seeing that Ravana, through infatuation for her, had been making such approaches, she flared up and shouted at him to clear off from her presence. Ravana then pounced upon her and caught her by her hair. She instantly cursed him : "You will die if you molest a woman without her wishes." She then burnt herself alive; she later took birth as Sita.

This story as related to Rama by the sage Agastya just after his return to Ayodhya from his exile, is incorporated in the chapters 2 to 37 of Uttarakanda of Valmiki Ramayana.

In this narration Ravana's genealogy is shown as under :



Ravana is thus shown as the fourth from Brahma and this Ravana is the contemporary of Rama who has been spoken of as 65th from Ikshvaku the founder of Rama's Sun-line dynasty. Ikshvaku is stated to be the son of Manu-Vaivasvata far removed from Swayambhuva Manu the first sage and king of this epoch White-Boar Kalpa. Brahma is the creator of all, of even Swayambhuva.

Here one has to note that the sage Vishrava cannot be the son of the sage Pulastya who has directly descended from Brahma. Here all the other descendants from Pulastya to Vishrava are all ignored by the sage Agastya as being irrelevant for the purpose. We have noted that the Agastya, Vasistha, Vishwamitra, etc. are all family names.

The Golden Deer episode : When Ravana heard the rout of his army in Janasthana, he became furious. He shouted. "How can a man dare accomplish such marvellous feats? Is he Lord Narayana?" Till then, the Rakshasas had undisputed sway over their areas all over the South including some northern areas known as Dandaka forest. Though sages and ascetics were vigorously trying to establish their colonies and fighting them with their bows and arrows, and swords, yet their number being small, the Rakshasas with their large man-power, could not be subdued. Even Rakshasas like Tataka, we have seen earlier, were very powerful and with their jungle hide-outs, they could retire to these, after successful depredations on the *ashramas* of the sages and the ascetics. Janasthana was however their fortified area with the seat of their governors Khara and Dushana. When therefore some men from the north could openly flout the Rakshasa authority in their stronghold and subdue them and kill their governors, Ravana the Emperor was naturally very much upset.

He was thinking of leading an expedition with full military formations, himself.

However, Shurpanakha arrived in time at Lanka, and acquainted her brother Ravana of the might of Rama and his brother Lakshmana. Her only desire was to heap disgrace on Sita. So she described the beauty of Sita in such eloquent terms that a thought to kidnap her and make her his queen, strongly possessed his mind. He thought that abducting Sita by some means would be better than open war. He had the experience of suffering defeat at the hands of Sahasrarjuna the Haihaya King and Vali the Vanara King. The thoughts of the security of his empire and the loss of his near and dear ones did not worry him so much as the lustful passion to have Sita as his Queen.

Nor was he concerned so much with the honour of his sister Shurpanakha. For he had earlier killed her husband Vidyutajivha practically for no reason. He then flew to Maricha's *ashrama* situated near Gokarna and divulged his plan to abduct Sita. Maricha was aghast, and called it a disaster of the first magnitude. He said that it would not only bring disgrace on him but would mean the annihilation of the Rakshasa race.

Ravana was in a fix. He was a terror to all including the Devas. He did not allow sacrificial form of worship in his kingdom. No beautiful woman was safe from his lust. Such mighty one could not understand how Rama, a mere man, could possess so much strength and also could have such a beautiful woman Sita as his wife. Moreover, Shurpanakha his sister would not allow him to rest in peace. Her only passion was to avenge the insult done to her by Rama. And the only action that would satisfy her was to bring dishonour to Sita. He, therefore, left Lanka and came again to Maricha in Janasthana and told him his predicament. He said : "How can I sit still, when my strong outpost in Janasthana is in shambles and my sister's humiliation is not avenged?" He also unfolded his plan : "Maricha, my dear Kinsman! Assume the form of a golden deer with silver spots and roam about Sita's *ashrama*. She would feel infatuated by your beauty and would urge Rama and Lakshmana to get you caught. When they run after you, I shall carry her off easily." Such a deceitful plan for abducting a woman, for such a mighty Emperor, to say the least was unbecoming.

Maricha would not listen. He argued at length against such a hazardous course. He then told him : "Rama is Dharma incarnate and very brave at the same time. Moreover, Sita herself is a flame of fire. You should not, therefore, adopt such a suicidal course."

But Ravana, under the spell of God of Death as it were, ordered Maricha to assume the form of a beautiful stag and draw Rama away from Sita. He was further instructed to simulate Rama's voice and cry : "Ah, Sita! Ah, Lakshmana!"

Maricha knowing Ravana's vengeful nature thought to himself : "I have to act according to Ravana's wishes. Otherwise he would kill me. It is better to die at the hands of Rama, rather than at Ravana's hands."

They both arrived at Panchavati.

Maricha performed the part assigned to him perfectly well. Sita entreated Rama to get the golden deer as a pet for her. Lakshman grew suspicious of the deer. He said : "He has heard that the Rakshasa Maricha can assume such a form and beguile the gullible." But Sita pressed on. She importuned Rama : "Look! It is all gold. If you cannot catch it alive, at least let me have its skin. We are shortly returning to Ayodhya. This is the best memento of our stay in the forest."

Rama could no longer resist. "Even if Lakshmana is right, let me kill the Rakshasa, the cause of the death of many ascetics" he argued with himself. They had a tryst with destiny. It all happened as Ravana had predicted. Rama was far away deep in the forest. Maricha gave out a cry simulating Rama's voice : "Ah Sita! Ah Lakshmana!"

Lakshmana who was stationed at their *Ashrama* to protect Sita, would not move. He knew that the Rakshasas were adept at simulation. Sita became furious. She was under the devil's spell as it were. She gave vent to cruel words like : "You want me, you are a traitor," and what not! Lakshmana again kept his cool and solicited her not to fall a prey to anger. He reminded her : "Oh, Devi! Rama is capable of taking on hundreds and thousands of such Rakshasas." But Sita was mad with anger. She began beating her breast and said : "If you do not go, I shall instantly covet death."

Lakshmana had to go. Immediately Ravana dressed in saffron, came to Sita's ashrama as a wandering mendicant. She thought to herself : "If I don't show hospitality, this ascetic will heap curses on me. I must welcome him." As was customary, Sita offered the holy Brahmin a seat and water to wash his feet, and fruits and roots to eat. She gave her introduction as Sita, the daughter of King Janaka and the wife of Rama the son of Dasharatha, and also narrated to him, why they were in the forest. Ravana infatuated by her dazzling beauty and form, disclosed his identity as Ravana, the King of the Rakshasas and the half brother of Kubera the god of wealth. He further told her that he had vanquished all including the gods. He asked her to leave Rama, a mere mortal, and live with him in his palace as his chief queen. These words were a bolt from the blue to that virtuous and chaste lady. She mustered courage and angrily asked him to leave the *Ashrama* if he were to save his life. Ravana lost no time. He immediately seized Sita. His aerial golden chariot materialized out of sky. Dragging her by her hair and lifting her up, he put her in the

chariot and sped away. She screamed and wailed, "Rama! Rama!"

Lakshmana Rekha : There is a popular notion that Lakshmana had drawn a line and told Sita not to move beyond it. If she did, she would meet with disaster. But in no Ramayana this line has been noted.

Jatayu heard the piteous cries. He rushed forward and reminded Ravana of his Dharma as a King. When he found that his entreaties and good advice was of no avail, he attacked Ravana with all the strength at his command. But the old hero was no match for this mighty demon. He could inflict wounds on Ravana, and destroy his chariot along with the charioteer, but could not free Sita. Ravana swung his sword and cut Jatayu's talons and wings. He lifted Sita and clutching her firmly in his hands rose high up into the sky and sped towards Lanka. Sita's wails, entreaties and curses had no effect on that wicked wretch. Sita threw her ornaments down so that Rama would recognise the direction in which she had been taken and rush to rescue her from the clutches of that sinful demon. Sita's moans and wails moved even the forest trees and creatures and it appeared as if the whole nature was lamenting out of sympathy for her.

At last Ravana reached his palace and placed her in the custody of the women guards with the instructions to treat her well.

He again approached her but she firmly told him that she would rather prefer death to dishonour. Ravana then ordered the guards to take her to Ashoka garden and gave her the ultimatum : "If you do not submit within next twelve months, I will have your flesh chopped and served as my meal."

Exhausted by fear and worry and cursing her foulness at suspecting the purity of heart of Lakshmana and remembering her Rama, she fainted.

Rama's quest for Sita : After killing Maricha, while Rama was returning to the ashrama, he saw Lakshmana coming in his direction. He anxiously enquired : "Oh dear one! why have you left Sita alone?" Lakshmana narrated all that had happened at the Ashrama during his absence. They both hurried to the Ashrama and to their consternation they found the Ashrama a deserted place. They were terribly downcast. Still mustering courage, they began a vigorous search. Then they came upon Jatayu who in his feeble voice related the abduction of Sita by Ravana and breathed his last.

Rama performed Jatayu's last rites as if he was his father and proceeded further to the south-west in his quest for Sita along with his devoted brother Lakshmana. They were on their way to the ashrama of the sage Matanga. While they were thus combing the forest they stumbled

upon a cave as enormous and pitch-dark as the nether regions. There they were accosted by a Rakshasi with a massive stomach. She caught hold of Lakshmana and invited him to have fun with her on the slopes of the hills and on the banks of the rivers around. She gave out her name as Ayomukhi. Lakshmana immediately pulled out his sword and chopped off her ears, nose and breasts. She gave out a scream and fled.

A little further away, they came upon a headless wonder. A huge monster with his mouth at the place of the stomach came forward to devour them alive. Rama and Lakshmana swiftly severed both of his hands with their swords. The monster enquired of their lineage. When he heard that his redeemers were Rama and Lakshman, he told them that his name was Kabandha and that he was under the curse of the sage Sthulasira for his arrogance and he would be redeemed by Rama. He thanked them and left his mortal coil. Rama cremated the body of that monster with due honours. While he was in the throngs of death, Kabandha advised them to make friends with Sugriva, the Vanara (the monkey flag or mask) chief who would help him recover Sita. Sugriva had his camp on the high mountain called Rishyamukha near Lake Pampa.

Shabari : Then they set out for Pampa. On the way, they arrived at Shabari's Ashrama. She had heard of Rama and was waiting to meet him. She was the disciple of the sage Matanga and wanted to die with him but he had advised her to await the arrival of Rama whose darshana would liberate her. Shabari welcomed the guest with due honours and with their leave, she kindled the fire and entered it. Her devotion to Rama soon transported her to the realms of the holy and she departed.

Be it noted here that Shabari was a shudra woman. She belonged to the aboriginal tribe and she was practising penance as the disciple of the sage Matanga also belonging to that tribe.

Friendship with Sugriva : Soon they crossed the lake Pampa and arrived at the mountain Rishyamukha. Sugriva watched those two young princes. He had been banished from his Kingdom and was deprived of his wife Ruma by Vali, his brother, only on suspicion. His first reaction on seeing these two young princes was that they were the spies of Vali, dressed as ascetics. He therefore sent his Chief Minister Hanumana to meet them and divine their purpose in arriving at the mountain. Hanumana soon disguised as a wandering mendicant, leapt off the mountain peak and planted himself before them.

He accosted them and asked them, who they were, and what was their purpose in visiting the mountain? They looked very virile warriors and so he was surprised to see them roaming about on foot dressed

in bark. Lakshmana narrated their antecedents. Hanumana also became free and frank with them and disclosed his identity. He told them that he was the son of Vayu-god (wind god) and could go wherever he pleased assuming any form if found necessary.

Rama was charmed by the diction and manners of Hanuman. Both of them were lifted up the mountain path by Hanumana by placing them on his shoulders. He announced to Sugriva the arrival of those two brave warriors. Sugriva was satisfied about their credentials and they both took vows to be lifelong friends, by going round the sacred fire.

Rama then asked Sugriva the cause of such bitter enmity between the two brothers.

Sugriva-Vali feud : In fact there was very minor reason why they became such sworn enemies.

Formerly there was one famous Rakshasa named Dundubhi. His son Mayavi had developed a feud with Vali over a woman. One day at dead of night Mayavi came to the doors of Vali's palace at Kishkindha and challenged him to a fight. Vali was a Vanara King and Kishkindha was his capital.

Vali despite Sugriva's and his wife Tara's advice to the contrary accepted the challenge of *Mayavi* and came out of his palace and rushed at him impetuously. Sugriva also out of love for his brother came out after him and both of them chased Mayavi who fled away and disappeared into a great cave. Vali bade Sugriva to wait outside the cave and he himself rushed after the demon into the cave. For days together Sugriva saw no sign of Vali returning out of the cave. A year thus passed away. Sugriva saw some frothy mixture of blood coming out of the cave. He also heard the groans and shouts of the demon fighting inside. In those he did not hear even an indistinct sound of his brother. He therefore concluded, that his brother had died. He then put up a huge rock to block the mouth of the cave, so that the triumphant demon would not rush out of it, and destroy Kishkindha. He then returned to Kishkindha and conveyed the whole incident and concluded that Vali was no longer alive. The ministers then decided that the throne could not be kept vacant and crowned Sugriva as the King of the Vanaras.

Sometime, thereafter, to the surprise of each one of them, Vali returned triumphant after killing the demon. Sugriva offered him his obeisance by touching his feet with the crown. But Vali would not pardon him. On the other hand, considering the ministers and Sugriva to be traitors, Vali imprisoned the ministers and banished Sugriva from the Kingdom. Not only this, but Vali snatched Sugriva's wife also from him.

When Rama heard this tale of woe from Sugriva's mouth, he promised to kill his brother, the tormentor of his wife. Sugriva on his part promised all help to Rama in searching out Sita and if necessary to place his army at the disposal of Rama. They promised each other to be friends at all times sharing each others joys and sorrows. Immediate plan was Sugriva should throw a challenge to Vali by appearing before the gates of Kishindha and while the two brothers fought Rama was to kill Vali with an arrow.

In order to assure Sugriva of his prowess, Rama lifted his bow and fired a deafening arrow, at a clump of seven *Sal* trees. The golden arrow pierced through all the trees, touched the earth and swerved and whizzed back into its quiver. Sugriva's elation at this marvellous feat knew no bounds. He prostrated before Rama in gratitude.

Sugriva was terribly afraid of Vali's strength. Vali was the son of Indra and once when Dundubhi, demon in buffalo form and possessing the strength of thousand elephants, challenged Vali to a fight, Vali lifted him by his tail and whirled him round and flung the dead body, which fell at a distance of a Yojana, four miles away. Sugriva was safe on that mountain for the sage Matanga had cursed Vali that he would die if he stepped on that mountain. There the drops of blood from the bleeding carcass of that demon body had fallen and thus contaminated that holy spot.

Vali's death : With the firm friendship forged with Sugriva and the action plan decided upon, there was no time to lose. Rama urged Sugriva to march on to Kishkindha. They came and lodged themselves in a thick grove of trees. Sugriva dashed forth and roared a challenge to his brother. Vali rushed out like the sun from behind the hill. The two brothers began their fight.

The two looked so similar in face and body that Rama hiding in the grove of trees was unable to distinguish the one from the other. In the fight Sugriva proved no match for his brother. He somehow broke his brother's grip and fled to Rishyamukha mountains to save his life. Vali did not want to kill him. Rama and Lakshmana rejoined him. Sugriva blamed Rama for the humiliation he had to suffer at Vali's hands. They pacified him and explained their problem. Later it was agreed that to tell Sugriva from Vali, a flower creeper named Gajapushpi (elephant-sized flower creeper) be tied round the neck of Sugriva as a garland so as to recognise who was who, and then Rama would kill Vali with an arrow, from behind a tree.

Thus agreed, they all reassembled at the gate of Kishkindha and Sugriva roared a challenge. Vali was startled. He was wondering how Sugriva a weakling before him could again throw up a challenge, so confidently. Tara his queen had her fears. She tried to persuade Vali

to desist from war and urged him to make peace with Sugriva. After all Sugriva was their close kinsman and if won over he would dutifully serve him. She said she had heard from Angada her son that Sugriva had secured help from Rama and Lakshmana, the two very valorous princes from Ayodhya. She pleaded with him strongly, but all her pleadings proved to be of no avail. He pacified her by saying that Rama knew *Dharma* and he would not himself break the rules of the game.

So he came out and the fight began. They fought like fierce lions. This time Sugriva stood up his ground for long. But Rama saw that he was showing signs of fatigue; he, therefore, sent a deadly arrow aiming it at Vali's chest. Vali fell down like a mighty forest tree, pierced as he was by that unfailing shaft.

Vali was puzzled. He knew not who was his other enemy who would perpetrate such a heinous crime, sending a deadly shaft from behind. He saw Rama and Lakshmana approaching him. When they came quite close by, he squarely blamed Rama for his cowardly act. He said : "You don't deserve to be called virtuous and brave. I was not your enemy. I could have alone killed Ravana and brought back Sita to you. And yet, you killed me treacherously. Why, oh, why did you do such a base act?"

Rama replied calmly : "Oh, Vali, it does'nt behove you to talk of *Dharma*. You have put Sugriva's wife forcibly in your harem while he is still around. I am the representative of Bharata, the King Emperor of this land." Then he quoted two rules laid down by Manu :

“राजभिः धृतदंडश्च कृत्वा पापानि मानवाः ।
निर्मलाः स्वर्गमायान्ति सन्तः सुकृतिनो यथा ॥
शासनाद्वापि मोक्षाद्वा स्तेनः पापाद्विमुच्यते ।
राजा त्वशासनपापस्य तद्वावाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥

*Rajabhih dhṛtadandaśca kṛtvā pāpāni mānavāḥ |
nirmalāḥ svargamāyānti santaḥ sukr̥tino yathā ||
śāsanādvāpi mokṣādvā stenaḥ pāpād pramucyate |
rājā tvāśāsanpāpasya tadavāpnoti kilbiṣam || 4-18-31,32.*

– Those who commit sins and are punished by the King, go to heaven just like the saints who do good. The thief either through punishment or pardon gets released from his sin. While the King who does not punish the sinner is visited by that sin.”

Rama further told him : “Just as the animals are caught through snare and are killed, similarly you who are not a man but the inhabitant of trees and so can be killed thus by a king.”

Vali recognised the truth in what Rama had conveyed to him and breathed his last happy in the thought that Rama and Sugriva, his brother, would do justice by his Angada. Vali had offered Sugriva

his golden chain as his parting gift in token of love. Sugriva was touched to the quick. He also was grief-stricken at the death of his mighty brother. He was crowned King of the Vanaras and Angada the son of Vali was recognised as the crown-prince. Rama and Lakshmana took shelter in a big cave in the mountains called Malyavan as the rainy season had started.

Was Rama justified in killing Vali? : Critics blame Rama for his action of killing Vali unseen by hiding himself behind the large trees. They find Rama's explanation unconvincing. What should be borne in mind here is what else could he do under those circumstances? He had given a pledge to Sugriva to restore his wife to him by killing Vali. We know that Rama was advised by Kabandha to forge a friendship with Sugriva who was similarly placed as Rama. Vali was considered to be self-centred and not prone to the sufferings of the others. Moreover Rama could not have challenged Vali to a straight fight with him as there was no direct enmity between Vali and Rama. Only after Sugriva was killed in the duel by Vali, that Rama could have entered the fray on the request of the other Vanara chieftans. This course was fraught with uncertainty, for with Sugriva's death, there was no *raison-d'être* for others to call upon Rama to come forward and kill Vali. Moreover there was no guarantee that Vali would have rallied all his army, round Rama. Again that would have meant further loss of time. For there was then hardly half year left for them to do the job of discovering Sita and rushing forward to meet Bharata on the appointed day i.e. just the last day of the fourteenth year of their forest-life.

It is still possible for the critics to argue : We are not concerned with the reasons that impelled Rama to act in this *adharmic* (unethical) way, howsoever justified his action may be on the grounds of expediency. The point is that in such a ticklish situation, the Dharmic conduct, is that what the high-souled persons like Rama choose to follow. The only course left before Rama was to choose the death of one between Sugriva and Vali. The course of events dictated that he would have to prefer Vali's to Sugriva's death. It is because of this dilemma that Rama tells Vali : "In my situation you would also have felt that the course I followed was the only one available under the circumstances."

Again Sugriva was the direct witness to Ravana's act of carrying Sita by aerial ways. He had heard the cries of Sita : "O Rama! O Lakshmana." Sugriva and his companions on the mountain had picked up a small bundle Sita had thrown, when she had noticed them there. Rama was shown the ornaments of Sita in that bundle and had recognised these as hers. Seeing the ornaments, Rama was beside himself with grief. He shaking with rage said : "I shall destroy that Rakshasa." Sugriva consoled him with the words : "Oh friend! Look at me. I



am an ordinary person. Yet I have controlled my sorrow and kept up my courage. It is all the more necessary for you a divine being to do so." These words had immediately made an impression on Rama. He asked Sugriva to show him the way, he would bring relief to him. At this posture of Rama, all the Vanara chiefs had vowed to regain his Kingdom as well as his wife. Rama then had made a resolve to secure the services of such a friend as Sugriva as King of Kishkindha and the Lord of his people. To crown Sugriva as a King, it was necessary to kill Vali.

The Vanara's search begins : After regaining his kingdom and his wife Ruma, Sugriva gave himself up to the pleasures of the flesh and forgot his duty to Rama. Sugriva had also taken Tara as his wife. The Vanaras had a different code of conduct. Lakshmana, therefore, was sent to enquire about the future course Sugriva was to follow. He met Hanuman, Sugriva's chief minister and conveyed to him Rama's anger at Sugriva's laxity in his efforts to set in motion the plans for search of Sita. Hanuman immediately agreed that Sugriva should wake up to his duties. He then conveyed to Sugriva the urgent message that Lakshmana had come in person to meet the King. Sugriva realised his folly and sent Tara to pacify Lakshmana. Then they met in cordial atmosphere. They both along with Hunumana and other ministers went to see Rama who had his head-quarters in a nearby cave safe from rains.

There, they decided upon a plan : (1) To find out whether Sita was alive, (2) where was she kept, and (3) to probe into the military might of Ravana and his army.

They chose Hanuman as the only person best suited for the job. Rama gave him his ring to show it to Sita when the occasion would arise.

As a precaution other search parties were sent to different quarters. Sugriva also took a round of his army units. He was immediately pleased with readiness and loyalty of different generals to die for Sugriva. Rama was requested to assume the command of Sugriva's army. However, as Sugriva was the King of the Vanaras he was made the Supreme Commander.

From the description of the army units stationed on different mountains, it appears that Sugriva was the King of all the Vanara tribes spread all over the then known land of Bharata. The units from mountains Mahendra, Himavan, Vindhya, Kailasa and Mandara were all given orders to assemble at Kishkindha. The other units from the mountains Ajana, Mahashaila, and the plains of Meru were also invited to join Sugriva.

From these details it is clear that there were three well defined centres of power in the then Indian subcontinent. One was of Ayodhya which had control over all the Vedic peoples who were followers of

Yajna – form of worship. The other centre was at Lanka presided over by the Rakshasas with their Chief Ravana, stationed at Lanka. They were bent on destroying the attempts of the Vedic sages to spread their culture over all the regions of India. The Vedics had control over all the plains of the Northern regions of India and the Rakshasas had their hegemony over the plains of the South. The third centre was at Kishkindha and it was under the leadership of Vali and Sugriva. These peoples were mostly living on fruits and roots and had very little knowledge of farming and cultivation of grains. However, from the description of the city of Kishkindha, it was a well-planned city with good roads lined with forest trees. Sugriva was living in a fort-like palace.

The surprise is that Sugriva's writ ran over all the hills people spread over all of India including the Himalayas and still far off regions. Meru mountain may be the Pamirs to the further north of the Himalayas. Their favourite drink was Madhu-honey and Maireya – a preserved fruit drink. It was of course not wine as it is separately mentioned. Occasionally it was also used as a more intoxicating drink. These Vanaras were not inimical to the Vedics just as the Rakshasas were. The latter were more after material pleasures and power than righteous rule.

Sugriva had vowed that his generals would find out the whereabouts of Sita in about a month's time. He had issued orders to his general Vinata to despatch hundreds of thousands of the *Vanara* soldiers to different directions to scour the forest, hills and caves to trace any sign of Sita. Vinata had gone to the east. Another general Sushena his father-in-law was sent to the west, and Shatabali was to look for her in the north. They were all given one month's time. All returned telling their story of failure.

Hanumana with Angada was sent to the south. But they all had to halt when they found themselves on the shore of a sea. Earlier they had entered a very beautiful cave full of fruitladen trees. That cave was built by that famous architect Mayasura. There they spent considerable time enjoying the bewitching beauty of the scenery around. They remembered their duty and tried to come out. But they could not find the way out.

As luck would have it, they came across Swayamprabha a *tapaswini* a woman ascetic. When they narrated their mission to her, she asked them to close their eyes and brought them to the sea shore. This simply means that she showed them the way and they came to the sea-shore separating them from Lanka.

How to cross it, was the problem. Angada decided to end his life. He was at his wits' end. Another general said : "One month is now over. If we return empty-handed we are sure to be visited with death

at Sugriva's hands. Then why not return to that cave and spend the rest of our life there?"

Hanumana crosses the sea : Hanumana could not tolerate such an unworthy advice. He said it is better to return and tell the truth, rather than live there enjoying the pleasures of the flesh. Angada sat on Kush-grass facing east and made preparations to die. Other vanaras also prepared themselves to die along with their leader.

Sampati a vulture king saw these preparations of the Vanaras for ending their lives, from a neighbouring hill. He came there to find out what all this was about. He listened to what they were talking about. The Vanaras were recalling the events in Rama's life. They said 'Jatayu a heroic bird fought with Ravana, but fell due to loss of strength'. When Sampati heard his brother's name, he flew near them. He heard the whole episode from the mouth of the Vanaras. Sampati then told Angada that Sita was safe in the Ashoka garden in Lanka. When he heard the news, he became wild with joy. Sampati further told them that Lanka was about 100 Yojanas (two hundred miles) away.

He asked his generals whether anybody would undertake the task of crossing the sea, visit Sita and return with the detailed topography of the region. Then Angada said he can fly that distance of 100 yojanas, but would not have strength left to return. Jambuvanta the senior general cautioned Angada against acting in haste. It is neither statesmanship nor propriety that risks the king's life thus. He suggested Hanumana's name for undertaking this onerous job. He praised Hanumana's powers and reminded him of his superhuman strength. Hearing these encouraging words, Hanumana jumped up and accepted the task. He roared like a thundercloud and sped across the ocean with the swiftness of wind. He was the son of God Vayu (air) and mother Anjani. Maybe the Vanaras had some sort of gliding device. Their tails pointed out to such means. With their tails alone they were able to fly high up in the air. Otherwise, they were all perfect human beings. Hanuman was a learned man. He knew Sanskrita.

On his way by air to Lanka, a serpent (Naga) Goddess Surasa by name blocked his way. She wanted to eat him up. But Hanuman by yogic powers became as small as a thumb, entered her mouth and came out swiftly. Seeing this marvellous feat, the Naga goddess blessed him and wished him god speed.

It appears that the sea had some shallow spots, where Hanuman may have alighted to take rest. His way may have been blocked by the local people. He used his diplomatic skill and persuaded them to allow him to proceed.

But this was not his last obstacle. While he was flying swiftly, he found his way obstructed and felt that he was being dragged down. A sea demoness Simhika was bent upon eating him up. He begged her not to obstruct his path, as he was engaged in a righteous cause. But she would not listen. He again shortened his form, entered her wide-open cavernous mouth and ripped a way out through her entrails and emerged. At last he softly landed on a hill top in Lanka. From there, he surveyed the land-scape. Ravana's capital was located on a mount called Trikuta. It was ringed by a moat and was very well fortified. It was a very beautiful and wealthy city not in any way inferior to Indra's capital Amaravati. The entire city was surrounded by a golden wall as high as a hill. He felt that the city was impregnable. He was filled with doubts and anxiety as to how to overpower this mighty King Ravana.

Hanumana at Lanka : While engaged in these thoughts, he assumed the form of a small monkey. He waited till sunset. He was just moving about in wonder and amazement. Just then a terrible looking goddess Lankini the guardian angel accosted him and shouted at him : "Who are you? Why are you here?" Hanumana in submissive tones entreated her to allow him in. He pleaded with her and appealed to her to allow him to see this beautiful capital of the mighty king. He said he had come there out of curiosity. He would just enjoy its beauty and move away. But she was not mollified. She became furious and hit him hard with her palm. As She was a woman, Hanumana pushed her away. She fell down. Instantly she got up and said : "You are a mighty monkey. Ravana's sins are many and grievous. Enter the city and do what you will." With these words she vanished. Hanumana climbed the high wall and entered that magnificent capital with seven and eight storeyed palaces with golden pillars and gold lattice-worked windows.

Here is a poetic description by P.Lal, I quote :

Hanumana was in Lanka,
The Rakshasa capital
Whose robe was the sea,
Whose ear-rings were the cow-pens,
Whose breasts were the forts,
Lady bewitchingly
Beautiful and radiant
In the moon-light night
Lanka,
A city of golden gates,
Door ways studded with lapis lazuli
Dustfree inner walls gleaming with crystal,
Gem-inlaid floors

With elephant motifs in refined gold,
 Silver-worked balconies,
 Filigreed stairways,
 Assembly halls so high they touched the skies,
 Peacocks and herons calling,
 Swans paddling in serene lakes,
 Ornaments tinkling.

(The Ramayana - P.Lal.Tarang paper backs-1989-P.102)

What a beauty and wealth the city possessed! Hanuman jumped from mansion to mansion, assuming a small form. He saw women exquisitely beautiful in close embrace with their husbands. He was searching for Sita. He did not see her any where. He had the minute discription of her as given by Rama, ingrained in his mind. He located the palace of Ravana and entered it stealthily. He saw there many very beautiful women sleeping in many rooms, but could not see Sita.

Then in one of the rooms he saw a cõt, a marvel of workmanship. On it was sleeping Ravana that mighty king, extremely handsome yet dark like a rain cloud. On another cot, he saw a fair complexioned woman of unparalled beauty. For a moment he suspected that lady to be Sita. But then in a split second he dismissed the thought. He said to himself how can Sita be in Ravana's palace looking so beautiful and dignified with all her ornaments on. She must be emaciated and grief-stricken, pining for the sight of Rama.

He passed from one room to another, no-where he could see Sita. He then became possessed with the thought that he had committed sin. He had gazed at the sleeping beauties in the palace of Ravana. They were all women belonging to others. To gaze at them was a sin he felt. He was seized with the terrible sense of guilt. But then immediately he realized that he had not seen them with a lustful eye. He then moved away and flew over the city. He searched every nook and corner, but could not locate his object, Sita, he had come in search for. He became despondent. Oh! Did Sampati tell them a lie in stating that Sita was in Lanka? Or has Ravana killed her? Or else Sita may have ended her life in despair. These thoughts assailed him. He was at his wits' end. He remembered Sampati's words, 'Sita in Ashokavana'.

Hanumana sees Sita : Then suddenly his eyes fell on a walled park. He prayed for success. He jumped up and sat on the walls of that Ashoka-vana. He surveyed the scene. It was a captivating spectacle. His heart throbbed with hope. He felt sure Sita would be here. He sat on a tree concealed by the leaves and the branches, constantly keeping a vigil lest he may miss the sight of Sita. Soon his wish was fulfilled. He saw a woman sitting on a platform surrounded by

the Rakshasa women. Though emaciated and pale, yet she was blindingly beautiful. She fitted the description of the image he had built within him.

While he was thus immersed in thoughts about her sorrowful state, he heard the chanting of the Vedic mantras, all over the garden and the Brahmanas offering morning ablutions to the Sun-god. He was surprised at the melodious tones of the singers pouring out their hearts in praise of the Lord. What a contrast! he said to himself. Amidst the chanting of the Mantras the tragic scene was being enacted. He saw Ravana surrounded by the royal paraphernalia and beautiful women in attendance, slowly but with dignified steps coming towards that hapless woman. Hanumana concealed himself behind the thick cluster of creepers.

Ravana approached her and used soothing words to calm her ruffled feelings. He said : "Why are you afraid of me? I love you. Be mine. I have followed a Rakshasa Dharma and so I have abducted you. I am not a wicked person to touch you without your consent. Oh lovely-eyed beauty! you have stolen my heart. I am the lord of the Devas and the Asuras. There is none greater than me in this wide world. Oh beautiful limbed Devi! have compassion on me. Be mine. That Rama is a wretched soul wandering in the forest leaving the comforts of the palace. He has not given you anything else but this forest life full of vicissitudes, come and be mine. I still give you some time or else, you will be killed and cooked for my meal." At these words tears began flowing down the cheeks of Sita.

She with deep anguish said : "Oh mighty warrior, is there none to give you sound advice? How can I be yours, when I am married to another? Rama, my Lord, is mightier than you. You abducted me stealthily. Do you not feel any shame for this dastardly act? You are the son of the sage Vishrava, and the brother of Kubera the Lord of wealth. Why do you become mean and have a covetuous eye on the wives of others? It ill-becomes you. Go, go away from my sight. Go to your wives. Be off from my sight, oh wretched one!"

Ravana shouted and drew his sword to kill her. But then he remembered his promise to wait for a year. He calmed and said : "There are still two months. Reconsider your decision." His other wives came and Dhyanya Malini particularly coaxed him to return to his place.

After Ravana left the scene, the women surrounding Sita began feeling sorry for her steadfast love for her husband. Sita could scold Ravana for following the unrighteous path. But what could she say to her women friends surrounding her? They were coaxing her to surrender herself to Ravana. They had all lost self-respect. They were she felt lacking in strength of womanhood. They were harassing her. The Rakshasis were debating the point whether they should kill her. There came at that time Trijata a kind-hearted woman. She told them that Sita

was divinely pure and Rama her husband would soon come and rescue her.

Hanumana was witness to all the drama enacted below. He was wondering at the cruel ways of destiny. Rama a very powerful and at the same time pious and virtuous man; such a man had to live in a forest! Sita equally courageous and virtuous lady had to give up her comforts of a palace life. In the forest, Rama and Lakshmana had to protect her in Janasthana against Shurpanakha, Ravana's sister. Fourteen thousand Rakshasas with their leaders Khara, Dushana and Trishiras were despatched to the kingdom of the Dead by Rama alone. Rama to secure friendship of Sugriva had to kill his brother Vali. Now to kill Ravana, Rama would have to come to Lanka and hundreds of thousands would then perish in the holocaust. For whose sake was all this happening? For Sita, none can equal the glory of Sita, he concluded.

He was in a fix. How to convey her his presence and his mission. If he were just to alight and announce, she would scream and the whole thing would be spoilt. Every one there would be alert and the whole thing will be out. He would be caught. He saw the Rakshasis had either left or were fast asleep. He chose that moment and gently began singing the glory of the house of Dasharatha. Sita was puzzled. Hanumana then jumped on to the branch of the Ashoka tree to which Sita was clinging. She was sobbing at and crying and blaming her fate. When the melodious tone fell on her ear she just looked up. Sita caught a glimpse of Hanumana. It was he who was singing that glory. She felt that she was in a lovely dream. Was it true she wondered. Again, she looked-up. He was there alright. It was then not a dream, she assured herself.

Hanumana made a sign assuring her that he was a friend. He clambered down the tree. With folded palms, he made a deep bow and addressed her as 'mother'. How sweet was that word to her ears! She was beside herself with joy.

Hanumana told her the object of his mission. He also acquainted Sita with all the events that took place since she was carried away by Ravana from Janasthana. Still she was suspicious of Hanumana. She felt that the Vanara must be Ravana in disguise. Sensing her doubts, Hanumana placed in her hands the signet ring of Rama, that he had brought with him to convince her of his identity as a messenger.

Thus assured, Sita enquired about Rama and Lakshmana and their health. She was happy to learn from Hanumana that Rama's thoughts were always filled with her. She at the same time was a little unhappy at the thought that he was passing anxious moment, because of his separation from her.

Hanumana then offered to carry her on her shoulders. She admired Hanumana's devotion to Rama. His superhuman strength and equally great courage made her to look at him with amazement. Yet she politely told him that it would do no credit to Rama if she was thus carried to him. She said, let there be a fight between Ravana and her Rama to end her sorrow.

She then narrated a few incidents in their life together. They were at Chitrakuta. They wandered about the fruit-laden grove. They were tired. Rama laid his head on her lap and fell asleep. A crow came and hungrily pecked at her breasts. Blood drops oozed from the wound. Rama woke up and seeing her in tears laughed at her discomfiture. He teased her for being afraid of a mere crow. But when he saw drops of blood, then he felt sure that the bird was some Asura. He sped a dart at him. It pursued him wherever he went. At last the bird returned and fell at Rama's feet for refuge and found it there.

Sita's message : She also gave him a pearl fixed on her forehead by Dasharatha at the time of her wedding. This sign from her would convince Rama that Hanumana had met her. She then sent a message to Rama to come quickly within one month and rescue her from the clutches of Ravana. If Rama would not come she said she would end her life. Hanumana assured her that besides himself, there were many Vanara generals who were capable of more daring feats than he. He allayed her fears about Ravana and his military might. He told her to take courage and bear with the misfortune for a month more.

Sita then conveyed her prostrations to Rama and blessing to Lakshmana who served them both, considering them as his father and mother. She also conveyed her good wishes to Sugriva the Vanara king, nobles, and soldiers.

Hanumana exhibits his strength :

Hanumana took her leave and thought of returning soon. But then he decided to teach Ravana a lesson and instil in him the fear lest he would molest Sita in the meanwhile.

Hanumana then destroyed that Ashoka-Vana, Ravana's wonder garden. It lay desolate. Soon there was commotion. The news reached Ravana's ears. He ordered his generals to trace the mischief-monger, catch him and bring him to the palace. They were no match for Hanuman. He could assume any form in an instant and evade the swarms of arrows. Indrajita the son of Ravana came out at last. He by his weapons could paralyse Hanumana who was then bound by the ropes and brought before Ravana. Hanumana was impressed by the radiance of Ravana's face. He addressed the king as a messenger from his king Sugriva and his friend Ramchandra, the king of Ayodhya. He requested Ravana to follow Dharma and release Sita. Ravana was terribly upset at the

impudence of the envoy and wanted to kill him. But his brother Vibhishana and other ministers importuned him not to kill a messenger from another king. As a compromise he ordered to burn his tail.

They wrapped his tail in cloth soaked it in oil and paraded him, through the streets of Lanka. They then set fire to it. Hanumana had thus the opportunity to see the king and his courtiers and other nobles. He also noted the topography of that fortified capital for future use. When Sita heard about the plight of her servant, she offered prayers to Lord Agni (Fire) and importuned him to be cool to Hanumana.

Her prayers had the desired effect. Fire was cool to Hanumana. Suddenly he escaped the clutches of his captors and jumped from mansion to mansion and thus set fire to the whole city. He then plunged into the sea and put out the fire in his tail and came ashore. Fear gripped him. He felt that Sita might also have been burnt in the fire he caused to the city. But he learnt that the fire was soon put out and Sita was safe. He went to Ashoka Vana again to bid goodbye to Sita. She was pleased to see him hale and hearty. She blessed him and wished him safe return. He consoled her and importuned her to grieve no more. She felt assured that she would surely meet her Lord.

As he flew back, the Vanara leaders on the other side of the shore saw Hanumana returning unscathed. He alighted on the Mahendra hill. He gave Angada the prince and Jamubuvanta the senior counsellor and others the full account of his successful visit to Lanka.

They then all flew to Kishkindha, Sugriva's capital and acquainted him and Rama all that Hanumana had done at Lanka. Rama was eager to listen to the actual words of Sita. Hanumana told him : "My Rama has rescued many from their distress, why was he not then rushed to rescue me from Ravana's clutches?" Hanumana then handed over the crest jewel that Sita had sent back to Rama as her souvenir. When Rama saw it, he wept bitterly and resolved to proceed to Lanka at once to free Sita from her captivity.

Rama's heart leapt out for Hanumana. He felt sorry that he had nothing worthy to give Hanumana for his unique and unparalleled services rendered unto him. He closely embraced him in gratitude.

The joy was shortlived, for Rama felt that the task of crossing the sea was formidable and well-nigh impossible. When Sugriva learnt of this fear of Rama, he himself approached and assured Rama of the powers and skills of the Vanara army to overcome all obstacles in the way. Rama then issued orders to the army to march to the sea-shore.

Rama's army marches to Lanka : Vanara army soon reached the foot of the Mahendra hills on the sea-shore.

In Lanka, Ravana wondered how a mere Vanara could come and cause such vast devastation. His counsellor Prahasta told him not to take this incident seriously. They were all caught unawares, he explained. Vibhishana counselled Ravana that time was still there and that Sita should be returned to Rama with honour. These wise words fell on deaf ears. Ravana accused Vibhishana of cowardice.

Ravana's other brother Kumbhakarna, reputed to sleep six long months and voracious eater, had also come to offer his counsel. He admonished Ravana for stealing Sita. He bluntly told him that his unrighteous act was bound to lead to his misfortune. In spite of this, war was declared by his brother the king Ravana, he said he would fight on his side.

Other generals heaped praise on Ravana and encouraged him to fight the issue out.

Vibhishana again intervened and advised his king not to take recourse to arms on account of Sita who belonged to another. For him she was a poisonous serpent. He told Ravana in plain words. "You are cruel by birth and by nature; you do things which are forbidden by Dharma. You should not now act impulsively but do what is good for you and for your country."

He advised Ravana to honour Sita as a sister and offer her the choicest of jewels in his possession and to take her to Rama and thus save himself from all trouble. When he saw that Ravana was not prepared to resile from his position even by an inch, he decided to leave Lanka to join Rama.

Vibhishana arrived at Rama's camp along with four of his advisors namely Anala, Anila, Hara and Sampati.

When he saw them coming, Sugriva suspected some foul play. So he sought Rama's advice in the matter. Rama convened the assembly of the elders and sought their advice. Sugriva opined that Vibhishana is a rakshasa and should not be trusted. He should be instantly killed. Hanumana said : "When I saw him in Ravana's court, he had advised Ravana not to kill me. We should keep a watch over him, but at this juncture, we should welcome him in our camp." After much deliberation Vibhishana was accorded a fitting welcome suitable to a great and a noble prince. Vibhishana gave Rama frank replies to all his questions about Ravana's preparations for war, about the strength of his army and other details. He told Rama that his brother was haughty in temperament and cruel in nature. Many in Lanka did not love him. Vibhishana's case has to be properly understood. It was not a defection to the enemy camp. It was the consideration of fostering basic ethical value of Dharma – righteous conduct. Rama or Sugriva were not attacking Ravana for money or political dominance. It was pure and simple protection

of Dharma – the Woman's honour in society. For such a cause Vibhishana came to seek protection of Rama. Lord Rama the Divine presence extended this assurance to one who had surrendered himself at his feet.

Rama was pleased with Vibhishana. As a mature statesman Rama immediately crowned him king of Lanka, in the presence of all the Vanara nobles. He was given status equal to Sugriva. Vibhishana had not expected such treatment from Rama. He considered Rama as Dharma incarnate. He immediately rose in estimation of all the army generals assembled at the behest of Sugriva.

Now the main hurdle before them all, was how to cross the sea. They sought Vibhishana's opinion. He advised them to approach the Lord God Ocean. After all it was Sagara and Bhagiratha, Rama's ancestors in the Ikshwaku line, that had filled the ocean with the waters of Ganga and that ocean got the name 'Sāgara' after the King Sagara. They therefore approached the sea with prayerful minds and chose the convenient spot from which to construct causeway. The vanaras led by Nala the Engineer-in-chief surveyed the sea and found out a shallow strip of water for the purpose.

This simple act of choosing a convenient strip to construct a causeway on water has been clothed in a mythological garb. Rama the Lord god is shown as an angry god angered at the obstruction of his path to Lanka by the sea. As his prayers to make way for him are not answered by the ocean, Rama is said to have taken the bow in hand and shot arrows irresistible as thunderbolt into the sea. He vowed to dry up the sea and make it passable for his army. Then Lord God of the ocean appeared before Rama the Lord of the universe and with folded hands praised Rama for his valour and said : "Oh Lord! you have made me what I am. Can I change my nature. The whole universe runs on the basis of the rules and regulations laid down by you. But one thing I can do. I shall show you the most favourable strip on which to construct the causeway."

The laws of nature cannot be changed says the Veda. Rama by his sufferings and valour commended the virtue of self-effort and self-reliance.

The bridge was constructed and Rama's army triumphantly entered Lanka, Ravana's dominions.

Inspite of Ravana's recent experiences of devastation caused by a single vanara general Hanumana and Rama's vast army positioned in battle array to enter the forests adjoining Lanka, Ravana continued in his dirty game of trying to seduce Sugriva to his side. He sent his spy Suka to Sugriva with fraternal greetings. Ravana's message to

Sugriva was : 'I am a king and you also are a king. Rama is an ascetic with no roof over his head. How does it affect you if I carry away Sita?' Sugriva in a contemptuous language asked the spy to return and convey his utter displeasure at Ravana's base act of stealing away Sita. Sugriva's man caught hold of Suka. But Rama rebuked them and allowed Suka to return in safety.

Rama's army then descended from mount Suvela constructed on Lanka side of the bridge and entered the forest adjoining Lanka. Rama looked at the city constructed by Vishwakarma the divine Architect. It was a wonderful city with numerous towers and flagstones made of gold. Suddenly the thought of Sita seized his mind. He however, controlled himself and asked different generals to take proper positions. The main army was placed at centre under the command of Angada the Vanara Prince assisted by Neela. The right wing was placed under Rishabha and the left under Gandharva Madana the invisible. Rama and Lakshmana were at the head directing the operations. Jambavan and Sushena were placed at the front to guard all army from any wanton enemy attack.

As the arrangements for army dispositions were being made Sugriva, without informing anybody, flew up in the sky and alighted on top of the terrace in Lanka where Ravana was resting. He at once seized him and knocked off his crown. They wrestled together for a long time. Ravana finding it difficult to overpower him began to try magic on him. Sugriva sensing this disengaged himself and flew back to Rama's camp. Rama seeing him return safely was happy but reminded him that he was a king and it ill becomes a king to indulge in such rash acts. Sugriva also knew this. Yet seeing Ravana that wicked soul in front of him he could not control himself and sprang upon him and caught him. He begged pardon of Rama for his fault.

Ravana was surprised at the quick and thorough movements of Rama. He could not believe that the Vanaras would build a bridge in so short a time. He then sent Suka and Saran again to move about as monkeys in Rama's army and bring all the details about the arrangements of Rama's army. They did as they were told. But soon Vibhishana recognised them. He took them to Rama who pitied them and instructed Vibhishana to release them. They returned to their king Ravana. All what they saw, was conveyed to Ravana with a request to release Sita. They also told him that Rama was handsome and generous to the extreme. Ravana did not relish these words of his own servants. He became furious. They however shouted 'victory be to Ravana our King' and ran for safety.

Ravana selected two more spies. They went to Rama's army and mixed with the different units. They climbed the mountain Suvela and surveyed the scene. At the sight of that huge army fear seized them.

Vibhishana caught Shardula one of the spies. The other escaped. Shardula was allowed to return by Rama. He returned to Ravana and repeated the same story. Ravana did not want to listen to the information unpleasant to his ears. He was at his wits' end and was confused.

Rama wanted to make last-ditch attempt to avoid war and human carnage as a sequel. He sent Prince Angada and his envoy to Ravana with instructions to convey to him his resolve and their army strength. Rama requested Ravana through Angada to restore to him his Sita with honour and hand over his Kingdom to Vibhishana who was now the crowned King of Lanka. That was the only way to save life, Ravana was firmly told.

When Angada met Ravana in his court and conveyed the message of Rama, Ravana was beside himself with rage. He ordered his commanders to seize Angada and kill him. Two of the soldiers caught hold of him. Angada flew up carrying them with him and flung them down. Thereafter he came down and broke the tower of Ravana's palace. Then he flew back to his camp.

Ravana was now seized with the wish to see for himself Rama's army from a high tower. He along with his ministers came up to the tower and surveyed the scene. The ministers pointed out to Ravana, the different Vanara heroes. He had already seen Hanumana, Sugriva and Angada. He saw Vibhishana his own brother by the side of that majestic and very handsome youth with matted locks Rama the husband of Sita, bow in hand. Some one drew Ravana's attention to that armed warrior and peerless bowman Lakshmana, Rama's brother. Ravana could not tolerate the praise bestowed on his enemy, by his own ministers. His own experience of his encounters with the three Vanara chiefs could not bring him any comfort. He was, though, not prepared to accept that he himself was unnerved not a little.

He long debated in his mind as to the next step he should follow. He thought about a plan. He summoned Vidyudjihva his trusted sorcerer. He commanded him to prepare a head just like Rama's and also the bow and arrows like those he used. With these he went to Ashokavana to beguile Sita. He went near her and told her, that his army commander Prahasta attacked Rama's camp the night before and killed Rama. He further added that several others were either killed or wounded and the rest of the army had taken to flight.

He then called the conjurer and asked him to place before Sita that head of Rama and the bow and the arrows. Seeing the head and the bow, she cried : 'How cruel is my destiny! All my meritorious work has proved to be of no avail.' She could not bear the sight and fell down and fainted.

In the midst of this drama, a messenger came running announcing the arrival of his army commander Prahasta. Sensing immediate important business requiring his attention, Ravana left the scene. As soon as Ravana left, the sorcerer could not keep up the illusion. Rama's head vanished in thin air. When Sita regained her consciousness, that gory scene had disappeared. Sarama a lady of the royal household and a friend and a companion of Sita was by her side. She consoled her and assured her that Rama was very much alive and it was the dirty trick played by Ravana to deceive her. Sarama then narrated the debates that were taking place in the palace and the Court. Everyone including his Chief queen Mandodari and the Ministers had been advising Ravana to desist from such ruinous course. But he would not listen. He boast-fully asserted : "I am the Lord of three worlds. I have brought Sita the Laxmi to the abode of mine, not to part with her." I may break but I shall not bend before anybody. I shall, I am sure, kill Rama together with his vast army. You will see that."

Everyone realised that it was no use trying to persuade Ravana to see reason. Everyone retired home to rest for the night. Ravana issued orders to guard all the gates of the fortified city.

Next day morning Rama issued orders for an immediate assault. The battle raged throughout the day. It was a fierce battle. Blood flowed in streams. There was slaughter on both side. Several duels were also fought.

The fight between Angada and Indrajita the son of Ravana was a sight to see. Angada destroyed Indrajita's chariot. Indrajita then resorted to sorcery. He disappeared in the clouds and from there he showered arrows on Rama and Lakshmana. Finally with his poisonous arrows he bound both of them. It was called Nagapasha bound by Cobra-like coils. Soon Rama and Lakshmana fell down unconscious. Panic set in the army. Vibhishana put courage in Sugriva and other Vanara chiefs. He said : "Rama and Lakshmana are still conscious, they are not dead. Let us regroup our armies and continue the fight."

With the news of victory of Indrajita over Rama and Lakshmana, Ravana issued a proclamation in the city that Rama and Lakshmana were slain by Indrajita. He told Trijata the Rakshasa woman to take Sita in the Pushpaka plane around the battle-field and show her their corpses.

Trijata was a shrewd lady. She had seen through the game of Ravana and Indrajita. When she took Sita in that divine plane, she saw Rama and Lakshmana lying on the ground bound together by the Nagapasha. Their faces were aglow. Had they been dead, they would not look as they did now. She urged Sita to take courage and be of good cheer.

After her visit to the battle-field in the plane, she returned to Ashoka-vana. She lay immersed in sorrow. Yet she felt assured in her mind that her Lord Rama and his brother would not die at the hands of Indrajita.

Vibhishana's words of encouragement put heart into Sugriva. The Vanara army regained its morale. Vanara soldiers had kept constant vigil around and guarded the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana. They also continued the fight as before.

While those around them were waiting anxiously to see them regaining consciousness, lo! and behold! Rama turned on his side. Slowly he regained his consciousness. The Vanaras became joyful. But their joy was short-lived. Rama saw Lakshmana by his side motionless. He felt he was dead. His grief was inconsolable. He did not want to live without Lakshman his alter ego. He asked Sugriva to return to Kishkindha with what was left of his army. When both of them were dead, Rama was sure, Ravana would harass them. He could not bear the sight of Lakshmana by his side lying unconscious. He again fainted.

Vibhishana was trying to bring order in the Vanara camp. He came near Rama and Lakshmana. The Vanara army felt he was a Rakshasa coming to kill them all. Jambuvan assured all the Vanaras that he was their friend. Their fear then was gone. But Vibhishana seeing Rama and Lakshmana still lying unconscious concluded that they were really dead. He cried bitterly.

Sushena, the physician, advised them all to be calm. He told them that they were still alive and asked Hanumana to go to the hills named Drona and Chandra in the ocean of milk and get the two herbs named Sanjivakarani and Vishatyakarani. He assured them that with the aid of these two herbs, the two brothers could be revived.

While Sushena was thus speaking, the Vanaras experienced strong breeze blowing from the sea, and the strong bird Garuda burst into their view. At his sight the serpents which had bound the bodies of the two princes, took to flight. Garuda covered the two bodies and gently stroked both of them with his wings and they woke up from their stupor. Garuda embraced them both and told them that he was their constant companion. Rama was Dharma incarnate and so he had come to his aid.

When both of them, the darlings of the eyes of all, stood up, they became hilariously joyful, seeing them hale and hearty. Ravana heard the sound of joyful uproar coming from the Vanara camp. He was surprised beyond imagination. He sent his men to gather the cause of this jubilation. They brought back the news that both the Kośala brothers were alive and that the Vanaras were again attacking the fortress of Lanka.

Never before had such a thing happened; none before had escaped unhurt the darts of Nagapash of Indrajita. "They are strange creatures", Ravana felt. "I have subdued the devas. How is it then that these two humans are escaping my clutches? Is he Narayana, this Rama?" he mused.

He then summoned Dhumraksha one of the mightiest of his commanders. He was happy that such a signal honour had been bestowed on him by his King by choosing to fight the enemy at that critical juncture. With huge column of army backing him, he straight came and fell on the army led by Hanumana. Vanaras fought bravely using trees and boulders as their weapons. Hanumana raised aloft a boulder and threw it at the chariot of Dhumraksha. The chariot was splintered to bits. A duel then was fought between the two chiefs. Hanumana flushed the life out of his opponent.

When news reached Ravana, he was down-cast with fear. He sent another general Vajradamishtra by name. He was proficient in Maya warfare. Angada took him on and killed him after a fierce battle. Then came Akampana a great charioteer (Maharathika) who was despatched to heaven by Hanumana. Ravana was very much depressed. All his great generals had fallen in the battle. Only Indrajita, Kumbhakarna Nikumba and Prahasta the topmost generals had remained to be used. Of these Indrajita's Maya could not work, as we have seen earlier.

He then chose Prahasta, his commander-in-chief for the job. He came to the front in his chariot. A great fight ensued between the two armies facing each other. Neela the Vanara chief was chosen to face Prahasta. He could kill the horses of the commander's chariot. Then the chariot itself was broken to pieces. In the duel that was fought between the two chiefs, the valient Prahasta fell down dead.

Ravana then decided to come himself on the battlefield. He soon came in his golden chariot with his huge army. He looked as if he was Lord Mahadeo coming with his Ganas. He was accompanied by *Akampana* on a mighty elephant. Indrajita also came in his chariot; other two great warriors Atikaya and Mahodara also came along.

Rama had his first look at Ravana. He felt he was glorious to look at. But then, he immediately remembered Sita. 'A great sinner,' he said to himself, and vowed to kill him. Neela opposed Ravana gallantly but he fell down wounded by a fire dart from Ravana. Then Sugriva came and hurled rocks at Ravana. Ravana despatched an arrow which was like Indra's vajra, Sugriva fell down and fainted. Several Vanara chiefs tried their hands at the fight with Ravana. But they were all ineffective. Then came Lakshmana who after a prolonged fight was hit by a Brahmastra by Ravana. Lakshmana fell down, unconscious. Ravana came down from his chariot. He tried to lift Lakshmana but he could not do so. Ravana was once able to lift a mountain, but

he could not lift Lakshmana for he was the part incarnation of Narayana Himself. In the meanwhile Hanumana came and engaged Ravana in a duel. Ravana fell flat on the terrace of the chariot. Hanumana took the opportunity to lift Lakshmana's body and carried it to Rama. With Rama's touch Lakshmana became his former self.

Rama took up his bow and rushed to Ravana to offer him a fight. Ravana was in his chariot. Again Hanumana lifted Rama and seated him on his shoulders. The fight between the King amongst men and the King amongst the Rakshasas began. Ravana instead of aiming his arrows at Rama began issuing them at Hanumana. Rama became terribly angry at such a vile behaviour. Rama in a fury issued forth sharp arrows. Ravana's chariot was broken and his horses were killed. Then Rama aimed an arrow at his chest. Ravana staggered at its impact and his bow slipped from his hand. At that moment, Rama hit Ravana's golden crown with his crescent shaped arrow. The crown fell down. His bow was broken. Rama allowed Ravana to leave the battlefield as he was without a bow. Crestfallen, Ravana returned to Lanka utterly humiliated.

Ravana then remembered his foul deeds and the curses heaped on him by the sages of yore. He became diffident of his prowess. He decided to summon his mighty brother Kumbhakarna. He had gone to sleep. He was in the court of Ravana a few days back. His sleep lasted six months. Ravana, however asked his men to wake him up. After tremendous efforts by several men at shouting and trumpeting and making elephants to walk on his body, he awoke. He ate the food rapaciously and shouted at the men around and asked them as to the reason for this untimely call. "Is my brother in danger? Is he alive?" he blared at them. They narrated the whole story of the series of defeats Ravana had suffered. Kumbhakarna then arrived at the court of Ravana and felt pity for Ravana's plight, when he heard of the deep humiliation his brother had suffered. He reminded him of his villainous acts and vainglorious confidence in his invincibility. Ravana did not like all his talk. He said that the time for the discussion of ethics in politics was then gone. The time was for him to act and defeat Rama. Kumbhakarna then saw the logic of his brother's arguments and out of fraternal affection and pity for him he moved out of the palace with his spear. He was backed by a huge column of the remnants of Ravana's army.

Seeing Kumbhakarna a gaint machine before then, the Vanaras were terribly frightened. They began fleeing in all directions. Angada regrouped them with words of courage and they began hurling huge rocks at this gaint amongst the Rakshasas. But they could not stand the attack of Kumbhakarna. They began fleeing in all directions to save their lives. Angada had again to rally round him all the Vanara chiefs and

warriors to put up a fight against Kumbhakarna.

But none could face Kumbhakarna. Even such great warriors as Neela, Sharabha and Hanumana could not stop him from his merciless slaughter of the Vanaras. Angada received a big blow and fell down and fainted. Kumbhakarna struck down the Vanara King Sugriva and picked him up unconscious and carried him with joy towards Lanka. He wanted to make a present of him to his brother the King Ravana. The whole capital rejoiced at this signal triumph of Kumbhakarna. While he was returning through the streets of the capital, the Rakshasa women standing on the balconies and terraces of their houses showered flowers and poured sandal paste. But this had a curious effect. The smell of the sandal paste revived Sugriva. He instantly realised the situation and began to bite with his teeth and tear with his nails the ears and noses of the Rakshasas who threw him down and wanted to crush him under his feet. But once Sugriva was on the ground, he flew high up in the sky and returned to Rama's camp.

Terribly upset at this discomfiture, Kumbhakarna returned to the battlefield with a huge iron mace and began unprecedented slaughter of the Vanaras. No Vanara chief could stop his march forward. Lakshmana tried to stop him but Kumbhakarna bypassed him and rushed towards Rama. A great battle ensued. Rama aimed powerful darts at that huge Rakshasa a giant machine armed to the teeth. Rama's arrows had no effect against him. Rama realised that he was mightier than Viradha or Kabandha the giants whom he had killed earlier. Nor was he to be mistaken for Khar or even Vali or Maricha whom he could easily despatch to heaven. So Rama thought some mighty astra-missile was required to be used. He invoked Vayu the wind-god and sent the missile against him. Kumbhakarna's hand that had held the iron mace was cut-off. Though Kumbhakarna screamed in pain, he pulled out a tree and threw it at Rama. With Indra-missile Rama could sever that hand which fell on the earth with a thud. With two more arrows, Rama could cut off his two legs. He then sent another missile hurtling against him. It severed his head, Ravana's sole hope was now dead.

Ravana was immediately informed of the tragedy that had befallen him. On hearing the news Ravana fainted. He soon recovered and said : "My wish to remain a King is now dead with the death of my beloved brother. My only desire left is to avenge his death. He then felt that Vibhishana his younger brother was right when he described Rama to be a very valiant and virtuous man."

At this juncture Ravana's brave sons Trishiras Atikaya, Narantaka, Devantaka came forward and consoled their father and offered to fight Rama, Lakshmana and others in battle and return back victorious. Ravana permitted them.

They all came in chariots and some of their nobles on elephants. They caused havoc in the Vanara army. But soon the Vanara heroes, Angada, Neela, Rishabha and Hanumana made mince meat of them. Atikaya who was like Kumbhakarna came forward. He could cut his way through the Vanara ranks and come straight towards Rama. Lakshmana accosted him and offered to give stiff fight. Atikaya was a brave soldier and adept in the use of the missiles. Lakshmana's missiles proved futile against him. Lakshmana then decided to use the Brahmastra the ultimate in weapons-system against him. He aimed it against his chest. His head was severed from his body which fell down on the ground.

With all his able fighters defeated and dead, Ravana's position became utterly hopeless. His last hope was Indrajita his son from Mandodari. He came to console his father. He had been earlier successful in binding both Rama and Lakshmana in a Nagapasha. He was Ravana's last hope. He sought permission from his father to go to the battlefield and fight. Before leaving, he performed a sacrifice and obtained a Brahmastra from God Agni (Fire). He then came to battlefield and vanished into the sky with his chariot and the charioteer. He began pouring arrows like rain on the Vanaras down below. The Vanaras could not locate him and so they died in hundreds. All Vanara chiefs including Sugriva and Angada were wounded by him. Rama's army reeled under his devastating attack. It appeared as if the whole army of Rama was wiped out. He returned to Lanka in triumph. Even Rama and Lakshmana lay unconscious on the field because of the impact of the Brahmastra. Only Vibhishana was alive. He moved about comforting the remnants of the Vanara army. He saw Jambavana more dead than alive. Jambavana asked him, whether Hanumana was alive. He was there hale and hearty. Vibhishana was intrigued at Jambavana's enquiries about Hanuman. He had not enquired about Sugriva his master, not had he enquired about Rama and Lakshmana. When questioned Jambavana explained : "If Hanumana is alive, all are saved. If he is dead, none can survive." Hanumana came forward and touched his feet and sat there with folded hands. Jambavana told him to go north to the mountain Himvana. "There", he said, "is a peak Rishabha in golden colour. It is by the side of Kailasa. In between is a peak by name Oshadhiparavata." He told him to bring the herbs named *mritasanjiva* which brought the dead back to life. He said : "Hurry up, there is no time to lose, you must return within 24 hours."

Hanumana leapt up in the air and was soon at that mountain of herbs. He could not recognise which was what. He lifted the whole hill and returned in time. The smell of the medicinal herbs was enough to revive them all. The bodies of the dead Rakshasas were however thrown into the sea. Ravana had felt that was the course to save his reputation.

When everybody stood up and looked happy and well, Sugriva ordered his army-men to light the torches and attack the fortress and burn whatever came across their way. Many store-houses of weapons were located and burnt. There was panic in the city. Ravana woke up from slumber. He sent Kumbha and Nikumbha the mighty sons of Kumbhakarna to fight with the Vanaras. They were able fighters, They could subdue some of the Vanara chiefs including Angada. Sugriva himself went to the help of his commanders. He praised Kumbha for his valour. But finding that Sugriva was assuming superior airs, he caught hold him. They wrestled with each other. Finally Sugriva gave Kumbha a mighty fist-blow and Kumbha fell down dead. Hanumana killed Nikumbha; several other Rakshasa warriors fell in the fight with the Vanara chiefs.

Indrajita at the bidding of Ravana again came on the battle-field. He was a necromancer. He created a Mayavi. Sita and putting her in his chariot he killed her in the presence of all the Vanaras. They were horrified at this seemingly dastardly act. They all felt that all was over. They were lost in grief. Rama felt that Dharma is not slated to win. When Vibhishana learnt this, he hurried to Rama and told him that Ravana would not allow Sita to be killed. He had learnt that Indrajita was performing another sacrifice to secure his victory over them all. "Let us destroy it, before he completes it", he urged Rama. Lakshmana was sent to accomplish the job.

Indrajita was engaged in performing that sacrifice at Nikumbhila forest a little away from Lanka. Lakshmana accompanied by Vibhishana, Jambuvana and Hanumana with their army units proceeded fast to Nikumbhila. Indrajita was performing the sacrifice at that place, which was defended by the Rakshasa army. Vanara army fiercely attacked the other army. A terrible fight ensued at that place. Indrajita could not complete the yajna. He had to rush out to safeguard the place from the attack. Hanumana rushed towards him. Indrajita was bent on killing him. Just in time Lakshmana came on the scene. Indrajita was well equipped with all the accoutrements for a fight. Lakshmana threw a challenge at Indrajita who could not refuse it. He had not completed the yajna, yet he had to fight.

When Indrajita saw Vibhishana, he accused him of abandoning his brother the King and his people and acting as a traitor by joining the enemy camp. He felt sure that Rama would throw him into the dust bin, once his purpose was served.

Vibhishana said : "You are the wicked son of a wicked father; you do not know what is Dharma. Your father is a sinful person. He drove me away. He stole away the wife of another. Rant at me as you wish. I am following the path of Dharma."

Indrajita spat venom at Lakshmana too. He sent arrows at Lakshmana.

They wounded him. Lakshmana also sent sharp arrows at Indrajita. The duel went on. They were like lions. Indrajita developed fatigue, yet he continued the fight relentlessly. Lakshmana also felt tired. The missiles were fired by each. Vibhishana was also in the fight. But he did not engage himself in fight against his brother's son. He had chosen other targets. Lakshmana and Indrajita were engaged in bitter fight to the finish. Indrajita's charioteer was killed by Lakshmana. Soon the horses were killed and the chariot was also broken. Without being noticed, Indrajita disappeared from the scene, commanding his men to continue the fight. He soon returned with another chariot fully loaded with variety of weapons.

With renewed vigour Indrajita resumed his fight with Lakshmana. It appeared that the fight would never come to an end. Many of Lakshmana's soldiers were killed. He quickly despatched an arrow which broke Indrajita's bow. No sooner the other was taken, it was broken too. His horses were soon killed and chariot was also broken. Then began the war with missiles. It appeared to go on endlessly. Then Lakshmana took another arrow, and in the name of Rama sent it. It severed the head of Indrajita from his body and the fight ended with victory for Lakshmana.

When Rama heard of Lakshmana's victory over Indrajita, he felt that he had won that war. Indrajita was the only formidable warrior on the other side. He hugged Lakshmana and congratulated him profusely. He also complimented Vibhishana and Hanumana for the singular services, they rendered to Lakshmana to enable him to achieve that very memorable victory over that arch foe.

Ravana's grief knew no bounds. His pain was intense. It was relieved only by frequent swoons. Soon he was seized with uncontrollable rage. He took out his sword and rushed to Ashokavana with a resolve to kill Sita. He behaved as one demented with sorrow at the death of his dearest son Indrajita. His wives and his ministers went with him. Seeing Ravana with a drawn sword in his hand, Sita knew not what had happened. Ravana was blinded by anger; even in that state of mind one of his ministers Suparshva approached him and said : "My Lord, it is not Dharma to kill a captive woman for no fault of hers. Your enemy is Rama. Turn your anger against him. Tomorrow is the new-moon day. Success will be yours if you set out for fight on that day. Then Sita will automatically be yours." These words pacified him a bit. He returned to the palace without speaking a word to anybody.

Ravana had a select army called Moolabala - source of strength. He issued orders to this army which had a pride of place in all the three worlds. It set out next day and surrounded Rama's army from all sides. It began the massacre of the Vanara army by thousands.

Seeing the carnage Rama took up his bow. It rained arrows as if out of a torrential rain cloud. In the tumult of the battle nothing was seen or heard except the shouts and cries : "He is destroying the elephant army, The warriors with the chariots are being killed, The horses with their riders are falling down dead, and so on." The Rakshasa army witnessed a strange spectacle. Hundreds and thousands of Ramas were seen issuing arrows from their bows dealing death on all sides. Yet each one saw one Rama creating such havoc in the Ravana's Moola-Bala. Very few soldiers returned to tell the tale of woe. Piteous wail issued forth from the hearts of every widowed Rakshasa woman. They cried - "Shurpanakha the sister of our King is the cause of our ruin. She went to the Dandaka forest and saw Rama. She fell in love with him. He was a married man with a righteous heart. He had left the palace and embraced ascetic way of life out of his desire to obey his father. She caused the death of everyone in battle at Janasthana. She came to his brother to tell him her ugly tale. Ravana stealthily brought Sita. It is the fate which has brought ruin to our King."

Ravana now set out vowing death to Rama and others. He said he would avenge the death of all his warriors and wipe the tears of their widowed wives.

Rama taunted Ravana thus : "A hero indeed! you the abductor of a helpless woman, you the molester of women, you stole her like a thief and call yourself a hero. Ravana rained arrows on the Vanaras like the rays of the sun. They were like flames scorching the Vanaras. They ran away and Ravana came face to face with Rama. Sugriva with the aid of Sushena had arranged the Vanara army. Virupaksha a close associate of Ravana came upon Sugriva who killed him. His another nobleman Mahodara then fell on Vanara army. Sugriva faced him and after a prolonged fight Mahodara was also killed by Sugriva. Mvhaparshva another helpmate of Ravana came and fell upon the Vanaras. Angada and Jambuvana broke his chariot. In the duel that ensued between Angada and Mohaparshwa, the latter fell down dead.

Rama then sent arrows against Ravana; these could not penetrate Ravana's armour. Both were skilled archers. Both were proficient in the use of the Astras - the missiles. The battle between these great heroes was unparalleled in annals of the whole history of mankind. Ravana was very mighty monarch of the ancient days. Looking to the galaxy of intrepid commanders who were trained under him, we feel amazed at the almost invincible military machine he had built up. The only drawback of the military training received by Ravana's men, was their unfamiliarity with the ways the hills people like the Vanaras and the bears fought. For example Kumbhakarna had captured Sugriva and would have made mincemeat of him had he not been able to jump up and escape.

The fight between these two valiant soldiers of the ancient days was in comparable.

*“Sāgaram cāmbarprākhyamambaram sagaropamanī
rāmarāvanayorayuddham rāmā-rāvanayoriva||51 to 52 parts*

– Sea is sea and sky is sky; the sea can be compared only with sea and sky only with the sky. Similarly the battle fought between Rama and Ravana is comparable with none else than with itself alone.”

There two heroes used different types of arrows against each other. Similarly they used different kinds of potent missiles against each other. The fight between these two mighty soldiers was a marvel to look at; every body around including the gods in heaven watched with wonder and admiration.

Seeing that each of them appeared to be invincible to the onlookers, Lakshmana and Vibhishana together attacked Ravana. Furious against his brother Vibhishana, Ravana hurled a powerful missile against him. But it was intercepted by Lakshmana. Again a mighty weapon was flung at Vibhishana, but that too was destroyed with missile by Lakshmana. It hit him in the chest and Lakshmana fell down unconscious. Rama could not afford to lose time in grief over this event. Hanumana once again flew to the north and returned with that Hill of Herbs and Lakshmana's life was again saved.

Watching in heaven this fight between Rama and Ravana was Lord Indra himself. Seeing that Rama was on foot, while Ravana was riding his chariot, Indra sent his charioteer Matali with the divine chariot for the use of Rama. With offering a low bow to Indra, Rama ascended the chariot and resumed his fight.

Ravana was very much wounded by the fierce onslaught of Rama. His charioteer seeing his master lying unconscious in the chariot, skilfully took him out of the battlefield.

After regaining consciousness Ravana returned to the field. After a prolonged fight Rama seeing that Ravana was getting fatigued, hurled his Brahmastra at him. Earlier Rama had sent many missiles and cut off Ravana's heads. But every time they were cut off, they rejoined again and again. This time Rama aimed the Brahmastra at Ravana's chest. It entered it and pierced the root in it in which lay his invincibility. This did the trick and Ravana fell down dead. He lay stretched on the battlefield.

The gods showered flowers on Rama from the heavens. His companions Sugriva, Vibhishana, Angada, Jambuvana, Hanumana and others surrounded him and congratulated him and hugged him. *

When however, Vibhishana saw the dead body of his brother, he

was overwhelmed with grief. He had earlier worshipped his elder brother as his father. Rama consoled him with the words that he was a kinsman of all of them. "He was a valiant hero and he died as a Kashtriya on the battlefield. Let us stop mourning; consider the next steps to be taken. Perform his funeral rites. All enmity ends with death."

Mandodari's lament : Why was Ravana defeated?

When the news of Ravana's death reached Lanka the women of Ravana's household along with Mandodari, the chief Queen the mother of Indrajita, came to the battlefield. Their piteous wail was heart rending. Their grief knew no bounds. Ravana was loved by them all. He was not a cruel or merciless husband or King. He met his death due to his sin in abducting the wife of the another against her wishes. None of them blamed Rama for his death. Mandodari's words uttered in lamentation bring out clearly the cause of Ravana's death at the hands of Rama -

"You had, my Lord, overpowered even Indra the Lord of the heavens. And you were defeated and killed by Rama a mere man. How could this happen?"

"You abducted Sita who was devoted to her husband; you did not listen to us. The wise counsel of Vibhishana you spurned. The cruel destiny has driven you to this course. Rama cannot be a mere man. In Janasthana at the behest of Shurpanakha your sister, you sent your mighty army of fourteen thousand picked soldiers led by the ablest of your commanders, Khara, Dushana and Trishirasa. Rama ably assisted by Lakshmana defeated it. You should have taken a warning, but you chose to go in disguise and forcibly seize Sita.

"When you heard that a bridge had been constructed across the sea by the monkeys, at the command of Rama, you did not realise Rama's superhuman qualities of leadership. He could civilise the hills, people and rope them in his righteous cause. He is Narayana himself. He is Lord Mahadeo and Sita is Maya. Rama is the avatara of the Eternal. He is not a man. He is Lord Narayana.

"Earlier you had performed austerities and you obtained all this abundance, power, wealth and fame. You were then a perfect master of your senses. But, once you became the mighty Lord of all what you surveyed, you became a victim of your unbridled desire. Sita is *Pativrata* devoted to her husband, like Arundhati to Vasishta. She remained with him through thick and thin, you should have honoured her for her steadfastness to her husband. Instead you asked for conjugal love. You caused her pain. The tears of her agonised heart have consumed you, you have got the just reward for your lust and sinfulness. We were so many of us in your inner apartments and yet you cast covetous glance at Sita a *pativrata*. I am the daughter of the Danava King,

and in no way inferior to Sita in beauty or other accomplishments. You brought death with your own hands when you touched her. Fate has plunged me in deep sorrow, oh my Lord! How can I live without you?"

"I was a very proud woman. I am the daughter of a mighty Danava King. I was the wife of mightier Rakshasa King Ravana. I was the mother of Indrajita who had subdued even Indra. Yama the god of death was afraid of you. Oh mighty one! Why have you left me behind? I was to die when my son Indrajita was killed. I lived for you. Now you have gone. Have I offended you in any way? Now that you have gone, I have perhaps offended you. Or is it the curse on me of many women who have been widowed because of you? I had told you, it was unbecoming of you when you lured Rama away and stole Sita. You had not done such a thing before. Rama did not kill you. It is your sinfulness that has killed you. You now relish the embrace of earth and not mine."

Mandodari fainted and lay by the side of her dead husband. She rose again and said : "No, you are not dead. You are sleeping. Answer my call you my beloved. No, no, all is over." And she fainted again. Somehow all were induced to leave the battle-field and return to the *antahpur* – the inner apartments of the palace.

Rama asked Vibhishana to perform the last rites of Ravana. He was now the only male member of the family alive. But he refused to do as was told. He said : "Ravana was *Adharmi*, unrighteous. He was tyrannous and cruel. He was *Pujya* – deserved to be worshipped as an elder brother, but he was a sinner. I am totally unconcerned with him now."

Rama was Dharma incarnate. He in his skilful speech cajoled Vibhishana to perform the last rites of his brother. He said : "Ravana was unrighteous in his behaviour no doubt. But he was a Mahatma, a great soul. He was brave and a man of superhuman strength. He was generous even though a tyrant. And we should not forget that we have to behave according to Dharma. Death is the end of enmity. Our purpose is served, our object is achieved. Samskaras should not be neglected."

The last rites of Ravana were performed. Vibhishana was then coronated and declared to be the King of the Rakshasas.

It was now time for Rama to visit Sita. She had heard of his victory. Mention of Sita's name brought tears to his eyes. He sent Hanumana to Sita with a request to convey to her the glad tidings of his victory. Hanumana did as he was told. Sita was exceedingly happy. Hanumana wanted to kill the Rakshasis who were harassing Sita. He was told not to do so, as these poor women were only obeying the commands

of their master. She said : "It was not because of them that I suffered. It was my sin in previous birth that made me to spend a few months of my life time in captivity. None can escape the workings of one's destiny. I have no angry feelings against these unfortunate maids of Ravana." Then she requested Hanumana to carry her message to Rama. The message was : "I am eager to see him."

When this message of Sita was conveyed to Rama, Vibhishana was requested by Rama to approach Sita and request her to have holy bath and then dress with good clothes and wearing her jewels, she should come to meet him. Sita did as she was told. She entered the palanquin brought for her and came to Rama's camp. All Vanaras were very eager to see her. They surrounded Rama so that they could have a close look at her. Vibhishana tried to make way for her. She was brought near Rama. She addressed him as : "Arya putra, ("My Lord"). She could not utter any other word. Her voice was choked with feelings.

Rama's voice lacked warmth. He told her : "I undertook the task of killing Ravana for the insult done to me by Ravana in abducting you. I have done my duty. I am the upholder of Dharma. I did not do it for your sake you choose your way."

These words of her beloved Rama were like thunderbolt on her ears. She could not believe that her Rama would say such words. She spoke with a faltering voice : "My Lord, these words from your mouth ill-become you. These are spoken by ordinary men to ordinary women. I am as chaste as ever. Because of the behaviour of some low-minded women, it is not proper to blame the entire womanhood. With all the years you have spent with me, you have not understood me. If these were your feelings, why did you undertake this stupendous task and risked your and others' lives? I also come from as noble a family as you do. I know as much Dharma as you profess to." With these words she in a firm voice told Lakshmana to prepare fire for her. "I do not wish to live any longer with such slur cast on me in the presence of such a large crowd."

Lakshmana looked at Rama who nodded approval. Soon the fire was kindled. Rama sat there with downcast eyes. She circumambulated her Lord and exclaimed : "Oh sages I bow before you. Oh fire, protect me if I am pure." She then fearlessly threw herself into the flames. The crowd was stunned for a moment. Rama's eyes were full of tears. His mind was ill at ease. All the gods and the sages assembled and said : "Rama you are the Lord of the universe. Don't you recognize your Lakshmi?" Rama humbly said : "I am Rama, a human being, the son of Dasharatha. I do not know anything else." Then Lord Brahmā the creator told him that he was Lord Narayana and Sita was Lakshmi.

Then God Fire rose and lifted Sita in his arms and made her sit beside Rama. Then Rama addressed God Fire : "Oh God! Sita is as chaste as snow and she is pure enough to purify the three worlds. But if she had not gone through this ordeal, people would have spoken ill of me. I am only afraid of the censure of the world of men."

Lord Mahadeo then said : "Rama make hurry now. Bharata and others are waiting for you at Ayodhya. Here is your father Dasharatha with me. Come prostrate before him." They did. Then Dasharatha said to Sita : "My daughter, don't get angry with Rama for his harsh words. He had to do so to vindicate your honour in the eyes of the ordinary people." He also praised Lakshmana for his love for his elder brother and for following the path of Dharma.

Indra also showered praise on Rama for ridding the world of Ravana. He said : "Ask any boon of me. I shall grant it to you." Rama then asked him to revive all the Vanaras who were dead because of their fighting for Rama. Indra granted the boon and all the Vanaras got up and stood on ground as if they had just awakened from long sleep.

Vibhishana then offered Rama the Kingdom of Lanka. Rama said, "My thoughts are with Ayodhya. This Kingdom, I am sure, you will rule wisely."

Rama thus evaluates the help rendered by Vibhishana - "You accepted me as yours. You aided me with your timely counsel. Your actions in the difficult moments always proved rewarding." When Vibhishana saw that Rama was very eager to return to Ayodhya, he brought the Pushpaka Vimana where Rama was.

Rama asked Vibhishana to give costly presents to Sugriva to whom he owed a deep debt of gratitude. Vibhishana did as he was told.

Rama with Sita in his lap and Lakshmana by his side, took his seat in the plane. He said to Vibhishana, Sugriva and others : "You have been my true friends. You worked a miracle for me." He specially made a mention of Angada and Hanumana. And then he sought their permission to leave. They all wanted to witness the coronation of Rama with Sita. They expressed their wish to accompany them. Rama could not refuse. The plane being divine, all could be accommodated in it.

On the way, Rama showed Sita all the places where he had occasion to stay in Sita's absence and explained the significance of each place. When the plane was flying over Kishkindha Sugriva's capital, Sita wished to see Tara the wife of Sugriva. They stopped there for a while. All the Vanara-women came. Along with them all the plane again took off.

Rama wanted to pay homage to the sage Bharadwaja at his Ashrama. He alighted there and went to the Ashrama. Bharadvaja was very happy to meet him. He told Rama that was the last day of his exile. He requested him to stay there for the day and then proceed to Ayodhya. Rama accepted his invitation and stayed and sent Hanumana to Guha the King of the Nishadas, and Bharata who was at Nandigram near Ayodhya, to inform them of his arrival.

Next day Rama met Guha and went to Nandigram. There the whole of Ayodhya including the Queen – mothers and sage Vasishtha had arrived. Rama met Bharata and hugged him. Then he fell prostrate before his mothers and the sage Vasishtha.

With the chant of Vedic hymns, Rama along with Sita entered his beloved Ayodhya and was duly coronated with unprecedented pomp and splendour.

Rama ruled his kingdom justly and ably Ramarajya, the phrase after Rama's just rule, is now synonymous with ideal rule by an ideal King.

Rama's avatarhood ends with killing of Ravana. We have an Uttarkanda as the seventh part of Ramayana. It delineates Rama's just rule.

Sita's second exile : Rama's rule was very efficient. He had complete information about what happened in his Kingdom, through his spies. He was very insistent on his informants to acquaint him with all the talks about himself, his wife, brothers, mothers and other relatives and friends. He wanted to establish an ideal rule with the sole purpose of advancing the welfare of his subjects.

One day his close confidant amongst the spies one named Bhadra told him that there was a general talk amongst a section of his subjects. The line of argument was : "If Rama can tolerate Sita as his queen, when she was kept as a captive by Ravana for over a year, they would have to overlook the vagaries of their wives. For the people follow the lead given by their King."

This pained Rama very much. For Sita had been tested for her purity and chastity in the ordeal of fire. Yet the subjects had been entertaining such doubts. He was sure in his mind that his Sita was as pure as ever. He was terribly upset. He could not sleep. He called his three brothers for a private conference and poured the agony of his heart before them. Without seeking their opinions or consulting his mothers or senior ministers, he conveyed his decision to his brothers : "Oh my beloved brothers! A very painful decision I have made and it is unalterable; you should not question it by word or deed. I have heard the loose talk of a section of my people. They question my conduct in entertaining Sita as my wife, when she had been forcibly abducted by Ravana and kept under his control for over a year. They

say, 'this action of the king would give a general permission to our women to indulge in a wayward behaviour towards us'. This is an indelible blot on my career. It has ruined my credibility as a virtuous ruler.

"Lakshmana, please consider it as my command and take Sita to the forest where the sages live. Sita is carrying and she has expressed her desire to spend a few days in the forest. You should abide by my orders dutifully."

"What a cruel decision!" Lakshmana thought. He went and saw Sita and told her to be ready to go to the forest. Sita was exceedingly happy. She took some presents to be offered to the wives of the sages and conveyed her readiness to accompany him. Lakshmana could not say a word on the way. Sita asked him : "What is the matter? What pains you? Are all happy? Why are you silent? Tell me the reason." Seeing Lakshmana still speechless and shedding tears all the while, after reaching the banks of Ganga - Tamasa, there she consoled him by saying : "Don't you worry; we shall stay there for a day or so and return." They then called a boatman, got into the boat and reached the other end.

On alighting from the boat, Lakshmana could not control his sobs. Sita importuned him to tell her all about his pain. He stammered : "Oh great one! Pardon me. I am the most unfortunate soul on earth. Death is better than my present plight." So saying, Lakshmana fell down and fainted. Somehow Lakshmana got up. Sita was completely bewildered. She said : "Oh Lakshmana! Tell me what ails you? Is the King hale and hearty? Are you cursed by him? Tell me, I command you."

Then covering his face, Lakshmana told her about the doubts entertained by the people about her chastity. He added, "The King with great pain in his heart and knowing full well about your purity has asked me to abandon you near the hermitage of the sage Valmiki."

These words were a bolt from the blue for her ears. She could not bear these. She was overcome by a swoon. Slowly she regained her consciousness and with profuse tears in her eyes and her voice choked up with sorrow, she gave vent to her wail and said : "Oh God! The Creator has made me to suffer thus. Did I cause the separation of husband and wife in my former life? In my earlier exile, because I was always by the side of Rama, I was worshipped by others. Now what should I do and say? Should I tell others that I have been abandoned by my husband for my bad conduct? Oh Lakshmana! I should now drown myself in the waters of the river Ganga. But can I? I am bearing the seed of this King's line. Or wait! Lakshmana, tell my mothers and the King that I am well. They know and the king knows

that I am pure. Yet he has abandoned me taking in view his kingly duties. Let him observe Dharma. It is my duty to wish him well. He is my Lord and teacher. I shall always remain true to him." Lakshmana, heavy in his heart, fell at her feet. He then returned to tell this tale of woe to Rama, the King.

Sita could not control her cries. Her piteous wail reverberated throughout the forest. The boys and girls from the hermitage of Valmiki came out and saw the woman in distress. The sage himself came and saw her. He immediately recognised her and consoled her. She was led to his hermitage and the ladies of the Ashrama took charge of her and looked after her comforts.

When Rama saw Lakshmana returning without Sita, he could not control himself. He began crying like an ordinary man. It fell to Lakshmana's lot to console him and to remind him of his duties as a King. Rama soon regained his composure and thanked Lakshmana for his timely warning. He said : "With a brother like you, I shall devote myself to my duty to secure the maximum welfare of my subjects." Sita was now out of the palace, but she now secured a permanent place in the heart of Rama.

Then some sages from Madhumati on the bank of Yamuna approached Rama and acquainted him with their plight. They were harassed by a demon Lavanasura. Rama despatched Shatrughna to rid the sages of the menace of Lavanasura. Shatrughna on way to Madhumati had stopped at Valmiki's ashrama for the night. During his stay, Sita gave birth to the twins. The sage named them Kusha and Lava.

Shatrughna defeated the demon Lavansura and established his righteous rule there.

Rama it is stated in Uttarkanda 51-20 that he ruled for 11000 years. As has been clarified in vol.II of this series, here year means a day and so his regnal years work out to about 30 In this *Kand* in 73-5 the son of a Brahmana who died young is stated to be 5000 years old. Here the year is clearly a day. The boy would then be of about 14 years old.

Shatrughna is stated to have returned after 12 years (in 71st chapter) to Ayodhya. This also indicates that the reckoning of 12 years is a year of 360-65 days, while that 11000 years is of one day as year.

Shatrughna on way to Ayodhya again stopped at Valmiki's ashrama. This time he heard the history of Rama (Ramayana-saga of Rama) sung with the accompaniment of different musical instruments. Shatrughna felt that all the events in Rama's life were happening before his very eyes. He was completely engrossed in listening to the story thus sung.

Next morning Shatrughna proceeded to Ayodhya. Rama was very happy to receive him. After a short stay, Shatrughna returned to Madhupur his capital.

Soon thereafter Rama decided to perform Ashvamedha. He invited Sugriva, Hanumana, Vibhishana and others. The horse under the command of Lakshmana was released.

The Yajna was performed in Naimishya forest on the bank of Gomati. Valmiki with Kusha and Lava built a cottage in the region reserved for the sages. He had taught Kusha and Lava the Ramayana he had composed. They were also trained to sing it to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They had instructions to sing the glory of Rama on the streets of the campus, as well as in the camps of assembled Kings and nobles.

These two sons of Rama were also trained in archery and in the use of different weapons. They had held the Ashvamedha horse also. But on the instructions of the sage Valmiki they had released it.

Rama himself had occasion to listen to his own life story as composed by Valmiki. When he came to know that these two young boys were his sons and his Sita was still in the hermitage of Valmiki, he sent messengers to Valmiki to come with Sita, in the assembly of the Kings and the citizens. Sita should then take a vow about her purity.

The sage accepted the invitation and came to the assembly. All citizens of Ayodhya and the Kings and nobles were in their seats. Sita accompanied by the sage entered that great hall and bowed before them all. Then the sage addressed the assembly.

"Sita is as pure as ever. She is virtue incarnate. The two boys who have sung the glory of Rama are her sons from Rama. Their very sight is enough proof to convince anybody of her sterling character. I am the son of the great sage Prachetasa. I have practised severe penance. My word is ever true. I tell you, Sita is blemishless. You, oh King Rama! You know her to be pure. If however you desire, she is prepared to say it on oath."

"Oh great sage! I have absolutely no doubt about her chastity. She had given proof of it in the assembly of the sages and the citizens of Lanka after the war was over. Then I returned with her to Ayodhya. Only to stop the vile and irresponsible talk amongst the citizens, I abandoned her. I am guilty of this crime. I beg your pardon for this sin. I know that these two sons are mine. I love her above every thing else except my duty towards my subjects. For the satisfaction of the citizens, let her take the oath."

The sage motioned Sita to act. She slowly came forward and said :

"No thought except Rama and his good had ever touched my heart. If it is so, oh mother Earth! give me a place into your heart."

As soon as she spoke these words, the mother seated on her jewelled throne came up, lifted her daughter Sita, and made her sit by her side. She blessed her with sweet words. The assembled citizens and sages showered flowers over her head. The gods from the heavens also showered praise on her with the words. "A virtuous lady indeed!"

Without anybody understanding what was happening before their eyes, the mother with Sita by her side disappeared in the bowels of the earth.

Rama with eyes downcast and shedding tears profusely, could not control his sobs. When at last he saw Sita had disappeared alone with the mother, he became terrifically angry. He said: "Give me my Sita, oh mother! or take me into your heart where my Sita is. If you do not do either, I shall dig you up and cause unheard of devastation of yours."

The assembled sages pacified Rama and brought to his notice his duty towards his subjects. They requested him to complete the *yajna* and continue to look after the welfare of his subjects.

He ruled with love and justice in heart for his subjects. When his time came, he discarded his mortal coil in the waters of Sharayu and attained his original state - Lord Vishnu. He was the Avatara of Lord Vishnu.

What noble souls - this Rama and his consort! Do we get such a couple in the annals of world literature?

Some western scholars take Helen the heroine of Illiad and Odyssey of Homer, the Greek epic poet, to be Sita of Ramayana. Can there be any comparison between these two?

What is Sita?

She is the embodiment of all the virtues. She is very steadfast in her love for her husband Rama who himself is equally great. With all his manly qualities, he had no place in his heart for any woman other than Sita. Both of them are wedded to their duties as the king and queen of their subjects. The welfare of their subjects again has the first place in their hearts above everying else including their personal comforts and duties to each other, and even above their lives. They both are true to their words and consider it to be their duty to show respect to their elders and teachers, and serve them unflinchingly. Their servants are loyal and happy with them. For the pledged word of their father to Kaikeyi, the step-mother of Rama, they both prefer hard and torturous forest life, to the comforts of the life in a palace.

They both possessed all qualities of head and heart. In bravery, there was none equal to Rama in that ancient world. He was the ruler par excellence and was very stern to the evil doers. Even dogs and cows got justice at his hands. He was a mother to his children and brothers and a loving father to all without exception.

What is Helen of Troy in comparison to Sita?

Only common quality between Helen and Sita was their uncommon beauty. Helen was the daughter of Zeus-Indra of Greek mythology from Leda. Zeus had another daughter Aphrodite from Dione. From many suitors Helen chose Menelaus. At the wedding of Peleus the King of the Myrmidons (in Greek mythology) with Thetis the nymph, all gods were invited except Eris one of the goddesses. She came uninvited. In revenge, she threw a golden apple with the inscription 'meant for the fairest'. It was claimed by Aphrodite, Athena and Hera. Athena was also the daughter Zeus sprung from his forehead. She is the Olympian goddess of wisdom. Hera was the queen of Olympian gods and wife of Zeus.

Paris the Trojan Prince was chosen judge to decide the issue as to who was the fairest. He chose Aphrodite who was the goddess of love and beauty. She was the mother of Eros by Ares, of Aeneas by Anchises, and of Priapus by Dionysus. As goddess of fertility she is also closely linked with Adonis. When Paris chose her as the fairest, she offered him the fairest of women, Helen. His abduction of Helen caused the Trojan war, the subject of Homer's *Illiad* and *odyssey* an epic poem of 24 books. She was carried off to Troy. Menelaus was the King of Sparta.

This war between the Greeks and Trojans was fought around 1200 B.C. over this Helen, between Paris a Trojan and Menelaus the Greek. This is the setting for Homer's *Illiad*. Ulyssus was a cunning strategist. The war was fought under the leadership of Agamemnon. Troy was a heavily fortified city. Greeks won it through deceit. Then Helen who had eloped with Paris, rejoined Menelaus, her legal husband.

What comparison can be made between Sita and Helen? Sita is love and virtue in human form. Helen is merely a sex-symbol. Unlike the Greek epic *Illiad*, *Ramayana* is not fed on the physical and grossly material features of life. Rama is Purushottam – the highest self. Can any of the Greek heroes come somewhere near him, in virtues like patience, gentleness, self-sacrifice, purity and bravery? Rama is love and knowledge absolute. For Homer telling the tale of that tragedy is everything; to Valmiki both the singing the glory of Rama, and delineation of his character is important. Homer's deities are often immoral, Valmiki's are morally faultless.

Aeneid of Virgil – the dominant figure in Latin literature, is a literary masterpiece but is confined to national boundaries. It is 12-book Latin epic telling the adventures of Aeneas, the Trojan Prince who escaped from Troy to Carthage and finally to Italy where his descendants founded Rome.

The Greek and Latin literary masterpieces are grand tales of adventures of their heroes Odysseus, Achilles, Aris and Hector; but these heroes nowhere come near Rama, Krishna, Bhishma or Drona either in character or valour.

Comparisons are odious. Homer and Virgil are great poets in their own ways. And Ramayana and Mahabharata are compositions of different age and climes. Valmiki or Bhagavan Vyasa cannot be confined to their national boundaries. They transcend these. As J. S. Eliot puts it –

“...the true sage is rarer than the true poet and when the two gifts, that of wisdom and that of poet's speech, are found in the same man, you have the great poet. It is poets of this kind who belong, not merely to their own people but to the world.”¹⁶⁹

Ramayana is the epic poem of world-wide dimensions covering as it does the whole gamut of human life. It portrays the perpetual struggle between the good and evil, showing the ultimate triumph of all that is pious and good. Rama is Dharma incarnate – रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः *Ramo vighrahavān dharmah*.

“During the reign of Rama, it used to rain in time, it was peace and plenty everywhere, all the cities and provinces were peopled by the happy and contented souls. All were healthy, nobody died before his time. None ever suffered from any disease and no calamity would occur anywhere.

काले वर्षति पर्जन्यः सुमिक्षं विमला दिशः ।
हृष्टपुष्टजनाकीर्णं पुरं जनपदास्तथा ॥ ७-११-१२

नाकाले म्रियते कश्चिन्न व्याधिः प्राणिनां तथा ।
नानर्थो विद्यते कश्चिद्रामे राज्यं प्रशासति ॥ ७-११-१३

*kāle varṣati parjanyaḥ, subhikṣam vimalā diśaḥ |
hṛṣṭapuṣṭajanākīrṇam puram janapadāsthathā || 12
nākāle mriyate kaścinnā vyādhiḥ prānīnām tathā |
nānartho vidyate kascidrāme rājyam praśāsati ||*

While Rama was ruling this earth there was perfect ecological as well as psychological balance. I close this history of Rama and his consort Sita with my respectful bow at their feet.

॥ श्री सीतारामचंद्रार्पणमस्तु ॥

PART-IV MAHABHARATA

I

To say that Mahabharata is a great epic, does not and cannot adequately bring out its greatness. It is the unparalleled portrayal of human nature in all its aspects. Its place is the first and the foremost in the annals of world literature.

None else than Bhagavan Vedavyasa himself, in loud and sonorous voice like that of a lion, describes its unique character thus :

“अष्टादशपुराणानि धर्मशास्त्राणि सर्वशः ।
वेदाः सांगास्तथैकत्र भारतं चैकतः स्थितम् ॥
श्रूयतां सिंहोनादो अयं ऋषेस्तस्य महात्मनः ।
धर्मे चार्येच कामेच मोक्षेच भरतर्षभ ।
यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नेहास्ति न तत्कुत्रचित् ॥

astādaśapurāṇāni dharmasāstrāṇi sarvaśaḥ |
Vedāḥ sāngastathaikatra bhāratam caiketaḥ sthitam ||
Śrūyatām simhanādo ayam ṛṣestasya mahātmanah |
dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe ca bharatarṣabha |
yadihāsti tadanyatra yannehāsti na tatkutracit ||

— All the eighteen Puranas (each Volume of epic proportion), all the Dharma shastras, (the treatises on the codes of righteous conduct), all the Vedas and the allied literature if put together on one side, and this Bhārata on the other, the former cannot be on par with the latter in its contents and quality concerning all the fourfold objectives of man, namely, Dharma (code of righteous conduct), Artha (science of economic well-being), Kāma (all rightful desires) and Moksha (the liberation). Whatever has been stated here is found elsewhere, whatever is not found here, is found nowhere.”

Can there be a greater boast? Yet, how true!

This great epic revolves round the deadly conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas the first cousins belonging to the ancient Kuru Dynasty. And we are told that it is history.

“जयो नामेतिहासो अयं श्रोतव्यं मोक्षमिच्छता । (उद्योगपर्व १३६-१८) — *jayo nāmetihāso ayam śrotavyam mokṣamichatā* — This is the narration of events as they took place. This history is named as ‘जय’ = ‘Victory’. It should be heard by all including those who are desirous of gaining liberation.”

The narrator of this great ‘Victory’ assures the listener as well as the reader that if one listens or reads it attentively, he is bound to

be a changed man. For it is not a dry narration of bare facts, but it is a treatise instructing the reader and the listener how to correct one's mistakes and enrich one's life in the light of what has happened to others in particular circumstances.

This history is a store-house of knowledge. It brings together at one place all what is necessary for a man to know. The proper and intensive study of this *magnum opus* is bound to confer on the student all what he desires. The study of this 'Victory' is a sure promise of victory to one desirous of it.

The Westerners however do not regard the narration of the events here as historical. They take it as an epic poem.

Pre-Bharata-War Dynasties : To trace the genealogy of this Kuru dynasty, we shall have to go back to Manu Vaivaswata the first king of the Post-Glacial epoch. The first Manu Svayambhuva belonged to the first period of the present epoch named Śveta-vārāha.

In the First Volume of this Series, we have shown that according to the Hindu Sankalpa, the current year 1992 is 5094th year from the start of the Kaliyuga. This Kali is the fourth in the Yuga-Cycle. From the start of the present Epoch called *White bear* (Śveta-Vārāha) about 1960 million years have elapsed. According to Pauranic calculations, this period is of about 31,000 years. (Please see our Volume III of this Series).

Kalidasa in Raghuvamsha notes : “वैवस्वतो मनुर्नाम माननीयो मनीषिणाम् । *Vaisvato Manurnāma mānaniyo māniṣinām* Manu the son of Vivaswān and the most honoured amongst men and himself the most brilliant one, was the first king of Mankind like the Mantra Omkara amongst the Mantras of the Vedas.”

The first in this cycle of yugas of this Kalpa – epoch – was Svāyambhuva Manu. He appears to have descended directly from Lord Brahmā – the Creator, as he is named Svayambhu i.e. born out of his own will. Our Manu is born of Vivasvan – the Sun. Maybe his parentage is also not known. He is the first of the dynasty founded after glaciation. (please see our Vol.I). He is founder of the Manukula Kshatriyas – the kings born from his family. There are two branches : 1. Suryavamsha – The Sun family, and 2. Somavamsha – The Moon family. These spread all over the world and ruled wisely as an Aryan would. (Please refer to Rajatarangini).

Manu started his era from the 1st of the bright half of the month of Magha (21st November 8576 B.C.). When the Vernal Equinox was in the first quarter of the Magha constellation, 120° on the Indian Standard Ecliptic.¹⁷⁰ From Sumerian chronology, 8320 B.C. appears to be the date of Ikshvaku the first king after Manu, of the Solar

dynasty. Ikshvaku is stated to be the son of Manu. His date may be 8520 B.C. instead of 8320 B.C. in view of his father's date 8576 B.C. According to pauranic calculation the date of this manu is around 13000 before present.

It is now admitted on all hands that the chronologies of the different dynasties given in our Puranas are by and large reliable. According to Pusalkar¹⁷¹ Manu must have flourished 95 generations before the Bharata war. We have determined the date of this war at 3138 B.C. We thus roughly get $8576 - 3138 = 5438$ years for 95 generations or 56 years for one generation. Looking to the longevity of man in ancient times and the peaceful regimes obtaining then, this cannot be said to be wide off the mark. Bhishma the grandfather of the Kauravas and the Pandavas was about 150 years old, when he actually had a lion's share in that Great War.

The Pauranic dates are more or less the same except the vital difference that these dates are before Kali i.e. before 3101 B.C. Thus there is a difference of about 3000 years. The dates worked out on the basis of the Puranas are more reliable, as they are given on actual calculations, while those noted on Sumerian tablets may have some other basis, which is not very evident now. In fact those dates may also be pre-Kali dates and not pre-B.C. dates. I have taken these from Waddel (The Makers of civilization).

In the chronological list given in Jnanakosh we find Yayati the founder of Paurava dynasty (it was later on called as Kuru dynasty) 6th in the line from Manu. He appears to have flourished around $6 \times 56 = 336$ or $8576 - 336 = 8240$ B.C. Lord Rama of the Ikshvaku is said to have flourished 65 generations after Manu i.e. $65 \times 56 = 3640$ or $8576 - 3640 = 4936$ B.C. His period may be around 4936 B.C. Suprisingly the working of the Pauranic calculations shows Lord Rama's Date around 4600 B.C. Mandhata another famous king of the Solar dynasty came 20 generations after Manu. His period may roughly be around 1120 years after 8576 or about 7456 B.C. Lord Parashuram came immediately before Lord Rama. He thus appears to have flourished around 5000 B.C. Dushyanta's and Bharata's period is given as 44 generations after Manu i.e. $44 \times 56 = 2464 = 5856$ B.C. In pre-Bharata war period, Chronology cannot be exactly worked out. From Bharata-war, this can be done fairly accurately.

As the king Ikshvaku is also found in Sumerian dynastic lists, it is likely that the prediluvian history of these dynasties has relevance more particularly to those regions. In the Indian context only after the Dasharajna war that these dynasties had established their firm rule this side of the river Ganga and Yamuna. By the date of Bharata War, the whole of India including the regions in south India had been

colonised by the Vedic people. We have therefore connected history available as from this date.

In the prewar history we have so many repetitive names that it is difficult to weave a connected story out of these. Following the lead given by Pargiter, Dr.S.V.Ketkar in his Jnanakosha has tried to derive some connected history. But we have not repeated it here. For, except the names we have not many details about these. Whatever we weave from these is more mythology than history.

It must however be mentioned here that a very great and famous war was fought around 7000 B.C. between the ten kings. This is a great divide in the post Glacial Epoch history. Around this time the Vedic people spread over all the globe, occupying different regions. They also spread to the Eastern and Southern parts of India from this time. For details please refer to our Vol.I.

Who were the Bharatas? The name 'Bharata' for this subcontinent is given after the important family of the Bharatas, as is mentioned several times in the Rigveda itself. This family is very ancient tracing its lineage right from the first Manu Swayambhuva. In Bhagavata Purana we have this categorical statement :

“प्रियव्रतो नाम सुतो मनोः स्वायंभुवस्य ह ।
तस्याग्नीध्रस्ततो नाभिरूपमस्य सुतस्ततः ॥
अवतीर्णं पुत्रशतं तस्यासीद् ब्रह्मपारगम् ।
तेषां वै भरतो—ज्येष्ठो नारायणपरायणः ।
विख्यातं वर्षमेदं यन्नाम्ना भारतउत्तमम् ॥

*Priyavrato nāma suto manoḥ swāyambhuvasya ha |
tasyāgnidhrastato nābhirūpasya sutastataḥ |
teṣām vai bharato jyeṣṭho nārāyaṇaparāyaṇaḥ |
vikhyātam varṣameddam yannāmnā bhartamuttamam |*

“Swayambhuva— his Son Priyavrata – from him Agnidhra then came Nabhi. From Nabhi came Rishabha who had hundred sons. His eldest was named Bhārata after this great Soul.”

In Matsya Purana also we have “मनुर्मेत उच्यते” Manu is called Bharata and the name of this region is Bhārata after him (Chapter 114).

For the detailed discussion, ‘why this name?’ refer to our volume No.1 page 1582. It should be clear from these references, that the name Bharata for this country is given because of the great exploits of Bharata, the son Dushyanta a famous king of Kuru dynasty, is misconceived.

Early History Of The Purus : We have just seen that Yayati the famous king in the Puranas was the sixth in line from Manu thus :

From Manu-Ila (the daughter)-Pururava-Ayu-Nahusha-and Yayati. The latter was Chakravarti samrat, the Emperor having sway over all the then kings of Bharata. Yayati had two wives, namely Devayani the dignified but self-centred daughter of Shukracharya the teacher of the Asuras and Sharmishtha a good housewife and daughter of Vrishaparva the Asura king (likely to be from a modern Assyria). He had two sons Yadu and Turvasu from Devayani and Anu, Druhyu and Puru from Sharmishtha. All these names are found in Rigveda. These five must have crossed the River Sindhu from the west for they are said to have taken part in the Dasharajna war as allies of the Emperor, Chayamana who had his capital at Abhivarta in Eastern Iran near modern Khorasan. This Emperor had to fight with Sudasa who was his vassal and had established himself firmly in the Punjab. He had raised his banner of revolt against his Emperor Chayamana.

Lord Krishna hails from Yadu, the son of Yayati and Devayani. Druhus have migrated to India and later on they became the Yavanas and Anus became Mlenchas having left the Arya-way of life and peopled regions around Iran and Mongolia.

Puru was the youngest son of Yayati, but the most famous as this Lunar dynasty (Somvamshi) gets its name Paurava from this famous ancestor. He had inherited his Empire from his father Yayati and expanded it eastwards to Ganga and Yamuna. Another famous name in this dynasty is that of Ajamidha, But the most important is Dushyanta and his son Bharata.

The Pauravas however suffered eclipse after the advent of Mandhata the mighty king of the Solar line. Yet they continued their line holding sway over some small portions between the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. Later, one family of the Pauravas established a flourishing kingdom south of the river Yamuna, named Hastinapur founded by Hastin king of this Dynasty. It was then a village near Meratha near Delhi.

The name Lunar dynasty is given to the descendents of Ila, the daughter of Manu. She had established her sway in Ailadesha or modern Iran. Solar dynasty is the name assumed by Ikshvaku, the son of Manu Vaivasvata. He was the brother of Ila but had his sway in modern Iraq and later his progeny spread to the regions in Eastern India around Ayodhya.

Kuru is another famous name in this dynasty much later than Dushyanta and Bharata. The Pandavas and the Kauravas are the descendants of this Kuru. The region which was occupied by the Kurus is known as Kurukshetra.

After Kuru came some 14 kings. Fourteenth was Dilipa. He had two sons, Pratipa and Shantanu. The eldest Pratipa had no interest in being a King. He was more inclined to Yoga and the renunciate

way of life. So the younger brother Shantanu became the King.

He had one son Bhishma, the famous grandfather of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the heroes of the Bharata war. For further details see under BHISHMA later in this volume.

While narrating the events which led to the Bharata war, I have given prominence to Lord Krishna's life and activities. He is the very soul of Mahabharata. Bhagvan Vyasa has specially composed Bhagavata Purana to portray him as the living God amongst the great personalities of the great epic. Yet as a man and as a statesman par excellence, we see him only in Mahabharata. Vyasa has given his life-sketch in the Harivamsha Purana which is an appendix to Mahabharata. In this Purana also he is shown as a man with super-human virtues and qualities. Still here he is a human being. In Bhagvata Purana, he is the transcendental personality of God-head, descending down on this earth as an Avatara of Lord Vishnu and performing actions befitting his status as an Avatara.

Some points of significance are highlighted here. The characters of Bhishma, Drona and others are delineated during this narrative. Here, however, some of the great traits of the heroes of this great epic which were not noted therein are noted.

Dharmaraja or Yudhishtira : Besides his steadfast adherence to extreme virtuousness, he was a man of extreme courage, tolerance for the other man's point of view, humility, compassion and love for his friends and kins. He was also nicknamed Ajatashatru, a man with no enemies yet he had to suffer unsufferable sorrow due to the wickedness of his cousin Duryodhana.

Bhima, the second Pandava was the muscle-power incarnate. Duryodhana the first Kaurava always vied with him. Howsoever he could try, he was unable to destroy Bhima. Shalya the brother of Madri one of the two queens of the king Pandu-Bhimasen's father, was proud of his muscle-strength. Bhima was attending the Draupadi-swayamvara as a Brahmana in disguise. Shalya challenged him for a trial of strength. Bhima could subdue him, but knowing him to be his maternal uncle, did not kill him (Adiparva-189-29).

The general image of Bhima is that of a person of superhuman strength. But he loved his kinsmen and friends and was an extremely peace-loving man. When Krishna was proceeding on a peace-mission to Duryodhana's court on behalf of the Pandavas, Bhima assured Krishna of his desire to be at peace with Duryodhana. He advised him to be very gentle in words while talking to Duryodhana (Udyoga-parva 74-23).

Arjuna was the most renowned archer and a very close friend of Krishna. Lord Krishna's partiality for this great soul was unparalleled. When Maya of the Asura clan was being burnt in the Khandava-forest

fire, it was Arjuna who protected him and saved him from being killed at the hands of Krishna. As a mark of gratitude, Maya built many buildings of architectural beauty in the newly laid-out capital city of Indraprastha and won the praise from Krishna himself.

The ever-moving back-stage figure is that of *Bhagavan Vedavyasa*. He is the son of Satyawati (the daughter of the king of fisher-folks) from the learned sage Parashara, who hailed from the famous line of the sage Vasishtha. Through Niyoga, he had become the father of Pandu and Dhritarashtra. Shuka the famous celibate sage was his son.

He had compiled the Veda Samhitas. He is also the author of Mahabharata the famous saga of the feud between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, his great-grand-sons. It is stated that the eighteen Mahapuranas are also from his pen. The famous Lord's Song— the Gita though a dialogue between Lord Krishna and his close friend and disciple Arjuna, has been reduced to writing by him. He is also said to be the author of the Brahmasutras also called Badarayana Sutras, as they were compiled at Badrinath in the Himalayas under the Badari tree (the tree bearing the berries).

Bhagavan Vedavyasa, as he is known, was thus the principal architect of Indian culture of this Kali age. His date may be worked out at about 3300 B.C. The Bharata war was fought in 3139–38 B.C., when Lord Krishna was of about 90 years old. Krishna was the contemporary of Dharmaraja, who was then about 95 years old. So his great-grandfather Vyasa must be of about 170 years old at the time of this great war. His date thus works to about 3300 B.C. He was born on the full moon day of the month of Ashadha (July). This is even now celebrated as Guru-Paumima day (the World Teacher's day). This is also known as Vyasa day.

This great grandfather of the Pandavas and the Kauravas used to stay at Badrinath in the Himalayas. But he moved about at will. From the epic we see him visiting his great grandsons on many occasions. He had predicted the Bharata war about 13–14 years earlier. But this calamity could not be prevented.

Because of his severe penance, he had acquired almost all the Siddhis, the divine powers. He had given to Sanjaya the charioteer of Dhritarashtra the divine power to see from the palace the events on the battle field of Kurukshetra. Sanjaya thus could hear the dialogue 'Gita' between Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

Vyasa's simple philosophy was to bring about the welfare of man here and now. He is not so much obsessed with what happens to man in the life hereafter. For he propounds :

“परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम्।

“*Paropakāraḥ puṇyāya papaya parapīdanam*

– helping others in their difficulties in meritorious being cruel to others or harming the interests of the others is sinful.”

Guru Drona is another father figure like Bhishma and Bhagvan Vedvyasa, in this great epic. He hails from the famous line of sage Bharadvaja. He along with Drupada the King of the Panchalas had acquired the knowledge of military art and science from the famous master Parashurama. When they had acquired the requisite mastery over the military science, they returned to their respective places. Drona had no job. He went to see Drupada his colleague in the Gurukula, considering him to be his close friend. But Drupada was puffed up with power. He looked at Drona with disdain and said :

“न ददिदो वसुमतो नाविद्वान् विदुषः सखा ।

न शूरस्य सखा क्लीबः सखिपूर्वं किमिष्यते ॥

“na daridra vasumato nāvidvān viduṣaḥ sakhā ।

na śūrasya sakhā klībaḥ sakhīpūrvam kimīṣyate ॥

– a pauper cannot be a friend of the wealthy, nor a dullard of the learned. An impotent one cannot seek friendship with the brave. How do you recall our old friendship, when you are not my equal?”

This was a great humiliation to this proud man. He nursed it through-out his life. He then came to Kripacharya the preceptor of the Kurus at Hastinapura and stayed with him. Once while the princes were playing at gulli-danda (a miniature variant of modern cricket), they lost the ball as it fell in the well. Drona was watching it. He came forward and helped the princes to get it back through his skill at archery. They all were surprised and conveyed this marvellous feat to their grand-father Bhishma. Drona was invited by him and appointed as teacher to the princes with the words –

“कुरूणामस्ति यद्वित्तं राज्यं चेदं सराष्ट्रकम् ।

त्वमेव परमो राजा सर्वे च कुरवस्तव ॥ (आदिपर्व-१३०-७८)

Kurūṇāmasti yadavittam rājyam cedam sarāṣṭrakam ।

tvameva paramo rājā sarve ca kuravastava ॥

– Oh Brāhmaṇa! consider the wealth of the Kurus, along with their Kingdom, as belonging to you. You are the great king and all the Kurus are your servants.”

Thus Drona became Guru Drona–Dronacharya and got immense wealth from Bhishma when all the Princes had become skilful in using the bow and arrow and other weapons including the missiles. The Guru remembered his humiliation at the hands of the King Drupada. The Princes volunteered to capture him and bring him before Drona. Duryodhana along with Karna undertook the mission, but failed. Arjuna then did capture Drupada and bring him before his Guru. Dronacharya was immensely pleased with Arjuna. Since then the Acharya became partial to him and bestowed love on him as a son. Drona had this weakness.

He loved his son Ashvathyama above everything else. When, therefore, he was required to fight with Arjuna whom he loved as his son, in that great war, he denounced the duties cast on him as a Kshatriya. A Kshatriya is required to fight in a war, even if his opponent is his own dear son. But Drona could have refused to fight stating that he was a Brahmana and not a Kshatriya. Drona however as the renowned archer and missile-wielder could not keep himself aloof from the actual warfare. So even though a Brahmana by birth and training, he deviated from his Varna and became in practice a Kshatriya. It is because of this, that he denounces his duties as a Kshatriya, which make a man a hardhearted soldier.

His weakness for his son and Arjuna also made him a blind man and he deprived Ekalavya a *nishada* Chief (a Shudra) of his thumb as he was afraid that he might outshine Arjuna. It was not to maintain the superiority of the Brahmana or Kshatriya that Ekalavya a Shudra was thus made to suffer. For Karna was also known as *sutaputra* (the son of a charioteer and so a Shudra) was trained by Drona along with the Kuru princes.

Arjuna also had high regard for his Guru. In Virata-parva (58-5 to 9) he compares Drona with Brahaspati the teacher of the Suras as well as with Shukracharya the teacher of the Asuras. He also states that the Acharya possessed all the good qualities like forgiveness, sense-control, truthfulness, liberality and righteousness, which a Brahmana ordinarily possesses.

Drona, though partial to Arjuna, yet tried to protect his King Duryodhana from the direct attacks of Arjuna.

Vidura the step-brother of Dhritarashtra and the son of Bhagvan Vedavyasa from the maid of Ambika the queen, is also a very respectable father-figure in this epic. He was by Varna a shudra, yet he was the Prime Minister and the wisest and the most fearless counsellor of Dhritarashtra. He was wise, truthful and possessed all the sophistication of a diplomat and an elder statesman. When Duryodhana was born, there were many bad omens. He along with the Brāhmana priests advised the king Dhritarashtra to discard him. Instead of being discarded he became the darling of his parents.

Vidura saw to it that Duryodhana's attempt to kill the Pandavas in the house of lac, was foiled by timely intimation to the Pandavas. He knew many languages and could use them effectively. In a language which he and Dharmaraja knew, he advised the Pandavas through aspy to get out of the house of lac through a tunnel.

He was the best friend and counsellor of Dhritarashtra. He never supported Duryodhana in his evil designs and warned the king against

the machinations of his wicked son and Shakuni, Duryodhana's maternal uncle, Shakuni was the evil genius behind Duryodhana. Once out of disgust for Vidura's persistent counsel against the evil acts of Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra drove away Vidura. But soon Dhritarashtra felt like fish out of water in the absence of Vidura. He recalled him. When the war became inevitable Kunti the mother of the Pandavas preferred to stay under the protection of Vidura at Hastinapura.

Vidura was a great devotee of Krishna. When Duryodhana forged a plot to capture Krishna who had come on a mission to bring about peace between Kauravas and Pandavas. Vidura warned him in the open assembly not to do so. For he would then invite the wrath of Krishna, which would burn him alive. Krishna then showed all the assembled the sight of His cosmic manifestation. The assembly except Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and Sanjaya got terrified at that sight. When Dhritarashtra decided to enter into the third stage in life and left for forest life along with Gandhari and Kunti. Vidura also accompanied them. He lived there as a Sannyasi. When once Yudhisthira had been there to see them, Vidura left his mortal coil and his essence got merged in Yudhisthira the Dharma incarnate. Vidura himself was the very image of Dharma.

Besides these, the other attractive figures in this epic, are : Gandhari and Dhritarashtra, Kunti and Drapadi, Duryodhana, Karna and Ashvathama, Satyaki and Kripacharya, Abhimanyu and Ghatotkacha and many more. At the relevant place, their characteristics have been highlighted.

This Epic is a historical narration : The Indian tradition, unequivocally regards this epic, besides being a poem, a book on history too. Vedavyasa himself states : "कृतं मयेदं भगवन् काव्यं परमपूजितम् - *Kṛtam mayedam bhagavan kāvyam parampūjitam* 1-1-61.

"Oh Lord ! I have composed this highly revered poem." The author, thus, considers this as his best poem. This statement signifies that Vyasa has tried his best to make his composition a highly artistic one. Seeing the popularity of this epic all over the world, Vyasa's statement has become literally true. But this does not detract from its being a narration of authentic history. For in 1.1.54 the narrator Sauti himself states that the son of Satyawati, Vyasa, has composed this history.

Vyasa then states that in this history, he has dovetailed the essential teachings of the *Veda*, the *Upanishads* the other arts, *Itihasa* (history), the different aspects of man's life namely, birth, death, diseases, fear and destruction. He further adds that the knowledge of stars, galaxies, information of forest and cities, rivers and mountains, different arts and sciences, science and art of administration and diplomacy, and everything one should know, has been incorporated in this epic.

While he was telling these things to Brahmā the creator he made a request to him to provide him with a writer. Then Lord Ganesha the presiding deity over all branches of knowledge (Vidyadhipati) was appointed for the purpose.

Soon Ganesh appeared before Vyasa and told him that he would take down the dictation provided Vyasa did not stop even for a moment while dictating.

Vyasa thought over the matter and said : "I shall abide by your condition. But whatever you write, you must first understand, then write" Ganesh agreed (11.1.78).

The Vyasa thought to himself : "I shall compose some verses during the course of this narration the meaning of which will be difficult to fathom. While Ganesh thinks over the meaning of these, I shall compose further verses" (1-79-82). Further we are told (in 101-104) that Vyasa had dictated this Mahabharata of 1 lac verses with supplementaries, while the original without these was of 24000 verses. In this latter group are some 8800 verses the meaning of which is not easily clear.

From this the modern analysts infer that Mahabharata of 1 lac verses is the last version, the two earlier ones being the core of 8800 verses called Jaya and a further expanded version of 24000 verses called Bharata.

It is clearly stated that this Mahabharata was taught by Vyasa to his son Shuka and later on to his other disciples. We do not get here the warrant for such an inference, that the first recension was of 8800 verses, the second was of 24000 and the last one of 1 lac verses. What is stated is that in this Mahabharata, there are 8800 verses which are of secret import. These are clear to the author Vyasa, to Shuka his son and Sanjaya the charioteer of Dhritarashtra, to whom Vyasa had given divine sight. If Ganesha was to be the writer, 8800 verses so insignificant a quantity that Vyasa would not require the assistance of so great a genius as Ganesha the lord of all the branches of knowledge. So the original version as told by Vyasa himself was of 1 lac verses, amongst which 8800 were the verses with involved meaning.

This is clear from the further information in the text (105-107) It is stated that the sage Vyasa composed 60 lacs verses - of which 30 lacs are preserved in the world of the gods. Out of the balance, 15 lacs were narrated in the astral world, 14 lacs to the Gandharvas and only 1 lac were reserved for this world of mortals.

Sauti the narrator of this 1 lac-verse-Mahabharata informs us that he has told this to us, as has been narrated by Vaishampayana the disciple of Vyasa. This 1 lac-verse-composition had been first narrated

by Vyasa to Vaishampayana.

Vaishampayana tells us that Vyasa composed this Mahabharata in three years (1-62-52). It would thus be seen that to write 8800 verses Vyasa would not require a writer, and to write 24000 verses a man of Vyasa's capacity and caliber would not require three years. There is no ground here for any inference contrary to what has been stated in the text itself. Even so there are three authors of the present Mahabharata, namely, Vyasa, his disciple Vaishampayana, and Sauti the historian. But the bulk has come down from Vyasa himself. What Vaishampayana and Sauti have done is to retell what has been narrated to Vaishampayana by Vyasa himself (1-1-101-109).

We have shown in our Vol.I that this Bharata war was a historical event and it took place in 3139-38 B.C. We have also given the detailed genealogies to the Kings from the Bharata war upto the end of the Imperial Guptas. Suffice it to say here that the Westerners have with prejudiced notions stated that the Bharata war was a mythical event. Even in the writings on topics other than Itihasas, this war and those connected with it are taken as historical personages. In a volume on astrology we get, "शासति पृथिवीं युधिष्ठिरे नृपते *Śāsati prithivīm Yudhishtire nṛpatau* - When the king Yudhishtira was ruling over this earth..." or in Paṇini's grammar we have वासुदेवाजुनाभ्यां वुन् - *Vāsudevārjuna-bhyām vun* - in this aphorism on grammar, Vasudeva i.e. Krishna, and close friend Arjuna - both historical personages are noted." Thus events and personages in this Epic are regarded as historical persons, by all later writers.

This Mahabharata was composed by Vyasa sometime after the departure of Dhritarashtra to heaven. He had left for forest life 15 years after Yudhishtira's coronation i.e. in 3138-15=3123 B.C. He died after 3 years. So the date of composition of this epic works out to some time after 3123-3=3120 B.C. Vyasa took 3 years to write, so this must have been composed around 3115 B.C. This composition was narrated for the first time at the serpent - Yajna started by the King Janmejaya the son of Parikshita who was coronated around 3102 B.C. Parikshita ruled for 60 years and Janmejaya while quite young was crowned king. So the sarpa-satra was started around 3102-80=3022 if we add about 20 years of young Janmejaya's regime. The date of the narration of Mahabharata on full scale is thus 3022 B.C.

Since then for the last 5000 years or more, this history of the efforts made by Lord Krishna to protect the virtuous and destroy the evil ones is being sung around the globe. This history, being the very life of man in all its aspects, is complete in itself. It is therefore described as : महत्वात् भारतत्वाच्च महामातमुच्यते - *Mahattvāt bhāravattvāt ca mahābhāratamucyate* - Because of the unparalleled importance and

weightiness of its subject – the life of man – it is called Mahabharata.” And who are heroes of this unique saga of life, the Lord himself – Bhagavan Shrikrishna and His close friend and the best among men – *Arjuna-eṣaḥ nārāyaṇa Kṛṣṇa phālgunaḥ ca naraḥ smṛtaḥ*. He is Lord Nārāyaṇa–Kṛṣṇa and phalguna the sage Nara and Narayana – the man and the Lord, the harmony between the temporal and the spiritual is the key to heavenly bliss.

II

BHAGAVANA KRISHNA

There is no doubt whatsoever in the minds of the majority of the Indians that Bhagavana Shrikrishna is the Godhead. He was the living Godhead to those who had the good fortune to live while he lived. The celebrated warrior Bhishma of Mahabharata had no doubt about it in his mind. He stated as much in the assembly of wise sages and the great warriors who had assembled at the time of the Rajasuya sacrifice performed by the Emperor Yudhishthira at the end of his victory over all the kings and chieftans of Bharata of those far off days. In one pregnant sentence Bhishma summarises the qualities and capabilities of Lord Krishna. He says

एषः एषां समस्तानां तेजोबलपराक्रमैः ।

मध्ये तपन् एवं आभाति ज्योतिषाभिव भास्करः ॥ सभापर्व ३६-२८

eṣaḥ eṣām samastānām tejobala parākramaiḥ

madhye tapanninā abhāti jyotiṣāmiva bhāskaraḥ॥

– In this assembly of kings, this lord Krishna with his brilliance, muscle strength and accomplishments outshines all as the sun does the stars.”

Then he concludes, “त्रयाणां अपि लोकानां अर्चनीयो महाभुजः । *trayāṇām api lokānām arcaniyo mahābhujaḥ*॥ (सभापर्व 38-9). He therefore deserves worship by all the three worlds.

Krishna : The Personal God : The great sages and poets all over the world have written in highly eulogistic terms, the exploits and the qualities of head and heart of many gifted sons and daughters of different lands in different times. But none in this wide world was regarded as the living God amongst men and women of flesh and blood. His love for his fellow-beings was intense. He did not stop at expressing it. He worked hard in putting it into practice. He had not only highly laudable qualities of head and heart, but his muscle-power was also of super-human nature. It has so far not been equalled by any. He was undaunted warrior and a statesman of highly gifted capacity. He was a poet, a philosopher and social reformer and organiser all rolled into one. He was a kingmaker, but refused to be crowned. He was a house-holder and the friend of the poor and the needy. He was

a man of rare beauty and strength and yet was above lust or passion. He never cast a covetous glance at wine, women and money. He was virtue incarnate. His life was without an iota of blemish. It is really futile to describe the indescribable. In his Gita – the world – famous Lord's song he confidently asserts :

“*Aham kṛstnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayastathā*–7–6. – I am the be-all and end-all of all creation.” He declares that he is the Creator and the Destroyer of the whole of this universe. No wonder, he possessed all the qualities which He alone could possess. He wills to create. He designs His creation. He runs it and whenever wills, destroys it to recreate it again. He is the theorist as well as the poperator. He has designed it according to certain set rules and also creates and runs it according to well-conceived plan. He behaves according to the ideals he holds dear to him. He is, therefore, the practical idealist.

He has once and for all laid down the ground rules according to which this creation has to work out its destiny. He shows by his own example as to how these are to be worked out in day-to-day life. He has lived such an ideal life. For, he states in the presence of all those assembled at the birth-chamber in Yudhisthira's palace at Hastinapura –

प्रतिज्ञे च दाशार्हस्तस्य जीवितमच्युतः ।

अब्रवीच्च विशुद्धात्मा सर्वं विश्रावज्जगत् ।

न ब्रवीम्युत्तरे मिथ्या सत्यमेतद् भविष्यति ।

एष संजीवयाम्येनं पश्यतां सर्वदेहिनाम् ॥

नोक्तपूर्वं मयामिथ्या स्वैरेष्वेपि कदाचन ।

न च युद्धात्परावृत्तस्तथा संजीवतामयम् ॥

इत्युक्तो वासुदेवेन सवालो भरतर्षभ ।

शनैः शनैर्महाराज प्रास्पन्दत सचेतनः ॥

“*Pratiñajne ca dāśarhastasya jīvitamacyutaḥ |*
abravicca viśuddhātmā sarvaṁ viśrāvayan jagat ||
na bravīmyuttare mithyāsatyametaḥ bhaviṣyati |
eṣa sañjīvayāmyenam paśyatām sarvadehinām ||
noktapūrvam mayāmithyā svaiṣṣvepi kadācan |
na ca yuddhātparāvṛttastathā sañjīvatāmayam ||
ityukto vāsudeven sa bālo bharatarṣabha |
śanaiḥ śanair mahārāja prāspandata sacetanaḥ ||

– I have not spoken a lie in the whole of my life. I have not done so even in the lighter vein. I have not left the battlefield as a coward, but have fought all battles thrust upon me. Oh! my dear Uttara! be at ease. I vow that this dead child of yours, I shall revive it in the presence of all those assembled here. As soon as these words were spoken by Krishna – who had never faltered in his duty and who

was pure in his heart, the dead child slowly and steadily showed signs of coming back to life and ultimately became a live child."

The first assertion : 'I am the Alfa and Omega of Life', we can take it as *Krishna's* utterance on a transcendental plane. It is the tenet of *Vedanta* philosophy that this whole universe is Brahman – the Ultimate Reality and so every individual can legitimately claim to be 'I am that *Brahman*'. *Krishna* being so confident of his being that *Brahman*, he had made such a bold statement. There is nothing wrong or boastful in making such an assertion if one views it from a philosophical plane. We ordinary mortals are not aware of this fearless truth. But *Krishna* was not an ordinary man. He knew the whole truth about the creation and its source. In today's world such an assertion is made by Shri. Satya Sai Baba. Daily he performs several super-human acts so that it is difficult not to put faith in it.

But the second one reveals the truthful way of life, which *Krishna* had actually followed through out. He made such a bold statement and vowed before those assembled that he had followed the path of truth scrupulously and if this is true, that dead child would revive and live its full life. And lo! to the surprise of all those present, that child regained its life, proving *Krishna's* assertion.

According to us, the finite souls, this revival of the dead, may sound miraculous, but *Krishna* who lived his life on the worldly plane as well as on the plane of the infinite, this was just a logical result of his steadfast will.

According to the *Pātanjala Yogasutras*, whenever one attains Samadhi – tuning the mind on the plane of Brahman, it is possible for that person to perform certain miracles. There is also a Sutra – "*Sankalpād eva tad śruteh – Brahma Sutra-4-4-8*. Those who have attained realisation can bring about results unattainable by the ordinary, by their sheer resolution." These great souls do not perform such miracles for their own selfish ends. Some times, on the spur of the moment, and to further some divine purpose they do bring about such results ordinarily considered impossible of achievement. Detailed exposition of how these seeming miracles occur is available in Vol-XI – *Ādi Śankara – The Saviour of Mankind*, as well as in Vol.XII of this series.

In this particular case, the purpose of this miracle was obvious. In that great fratricidal Bharata war, nearly the whole young generation of the then Bharata had been put to the sword or had become the target of an arrow. As far as the *Pandavas* – the victors in this bloody but righteous war – were concerned all their sons and grandsons were killed. There was none left to continue their line on the Imperial throne. This terrible war was fought to establish the supremacy of justice over injustice. If as a result of this war there was not to be any one

to continue to rule on the lines of Dharma for which this war was fought, the divine purpose would have been set at naught. To restore the balance, therefore, this Imperial line required to be continued. There was yet another reason. There was a general impression in the air, that this war had not achieved anything. So Krishna's policies had failed. He wanted to remove this widespread impression and firmly establish in the minds of men that it was the divine purpose to secure the triumph of good over evil.

Krishna's mission : An attempt is here made to analyse Krishna's life and actions from this declared objective of his. Yudhishtira the eldest of the Pandavas was even prepared to quit the political scene in favour of his cousins – his arch foes and take to the life of a renunciate in order to avoid killing of his own kinsmen in that war. He felt that he should renounce his legitimate right to the kingdom of Hastinapura and thus avoid bloodshed. But Krishna was totally opposed to such a course of action. He stated that the Pandavas had the legal right to the throne of Hastinapura. They strove hard to secure this objective without unleashing the evil of the fratricidal war. But the Kauravas were not prepared to yield even an inch of space which the Pandavas can call their own, leave aside the right to the whole Kingdom. Even Krishna himself had attempted for a peaceful settlement of the dispute through some compromise, but to no avail. Krishna, therefore, enjoined on all the necessity of performing one's duty in a spirit of detachment and dispassion. His emphasis was on maintaining Dharma – righteous action for upholding the social order on an even keel. He declares in Gita in no uncertain terms that his advent on this earth was for establishing firmly the path of Dharma so that the evil-doers would be destroyed and the good protected (4-7). His concern was not for helping the Pandavas to gain kingdom for them. His concern was establishing the rule of justice in the society as a whole. Because the cause of the Pandava's was right that he sided with them. Otherwise Bhishma, Drona, who were on the side of the Kauravas were very revered figures even in the eyes of Krishna. But they had not shown that concern for righteous action, as Krishna had done. They pleaded helplessness in the face of the obduracy of Duryodhana the Kaurava chief.

There is reason to believe that but for Krishna this great war would not have been fought. When it became amply clear that Duryodhana would not part with even an atom of space for Pandavas without a fight and when under the inspiration of Krishna the Pandavas started preparation for war, Dhritarashtra the blind king and father of Duryodhana sent Sanjaya his trusted ambassador to Yudhishtira to persuade him to desist from such preparation and thus help him to avoid this bloody war. Sanjaya on behalf of the king pleaded with Yudhishtira, "Oh!

great man, my king and your revered uncle sends you greetings and requests you to avoid this war. As you are a man with a firm belief in right action, he hopes that you will help him avoid this fratricidal war in which thousands and thousands of kinsmen and able – bodied persons will perish. His son *Duryodhana* is a wicked and adamant person and he would not listen to his sane advice. But you are differently made. You are a virtuous person with no selfish motive. Please, therefore, avoid this war and so prevent the senseless killings.”

Yudhishtira was moved by these words. He felt : “What his uncle says is true. Maybe, the law is on my side. But I must take into account the humanitarian considerations. By not preventing this war, shall I not be responsible for the heinous crime of killing my revered teachers like *Drona*, and respectable and sagelike elder like *Bhisma*? What really is good for me? In acquiring worldly possessions, does there lie true welfare? Why should I be after these ephemeral worldly possessions and pleasures? What is kingdom worth if in the process of acquiring it, I have to slaughter my teacher and worthy elder like *Bhisma* and other innocent and able bodied persons? It is sheer folly to engage in this war.”

But *Krishna* would not tolerate such an idea. He had to think from the point of view of real good of the entire creation. He pointed out that this war was not a sinful one. He was not advocating it from any selfish motive. As far as he was concerned, he had nothing to gain from this war, except to help to establish *Dharma* and suppress the ascendancy of evil. So he urged *Yudhishtira* not to desist from fighting this war, meant to suppress the evil and help the ascendancy of good.

He points out to *Sanjaya* that his king’s (*Dhritarashtra*’s) advice should be directed to his own person. Charity must begin at home. If *Dhritarashtra* abdicates his throne in favour of *Yudhishtira* the rightful owner to the throne, all this mischief would be nipped in the bud.

Krishna well knew the source of all this evil. It was *Dhritarashtra* goaded by the evil genius *Duryodhana*, his son, who was the root cause of all this trouble. He clearly saw that this combine of the father and the son would do all in their power to deprive the *Pandavas* of gaining their rightful objective. Yet *Krishna* decided to make the last effort himself to avoid this senseless war. He knew that his attempt would also prove futile. And yet he gives his reason why he wants to make such an effort. He states :

“न जातु गमनं पार्थ भवेत्तत्र निरर्थकम् ।

अर्थप्राप्तिः कदाचित् स्यादन्ततो वा अप्यवाच्यता ॥

na jātu gamanam pārtha, bhavet tatra nirarthakam

arthaprāptih kadācit syādantato vāpyavācyaṭā

– Even if I fail to conclude peace with the *Kauravas*, yet my attempt

would not be meaningless. Possibly I shall secure some wealth for you all and thus avoid war, or else, nobody would accuse me of not having tried my hand at it."

He wanted to put in an all out effort to avoid this war. It was openly being said then, that there were only two persons then who could avoid that ensuing conflict, one was *Duryodhana* and the other was *Krishna*. The former being out of question because of his utter wickedness, the whole burden now fell on *Krishna*. So he did his level best to avoid this human slaughter by making the last attempt.

Let us remember here that *Dharmaraja* was no mere tool in the hands of *Krishna*. He was himself a man of convictions. He also saw that justice was on his side. He was hesitating only because of inhuman nature of war. But ultimately he fell in line with *Krishna*, for he himself became convinced that truth must prevail if Dharma-righteousness was to prevail.

Krishna had a very difficult task before him. *Duryodhana* the leader of the *Kauravas* was hell-bent on refusing an inch of space (needle-point soil as the author of *Mahabharata* puts it) to the *Pandavas*. Another factor was, there were many amongst the kings of those days who for one reason or the other had become inimical to *Krishna* who had humbled them for their evil doings. *Krishna* was always on the side of the righteous. He never coveted anything for himself, but never allowed any injustice to go unpunished if it came to his notice. He never looked to the position, the evil-doer held. The high and the low whoever committed the evil act, whenever it came to the notice of *Krishna* punishment was meted out to him. These kings had assembled at the court of *Duryodhana* when *Krishna* decided to visit that court for pleading for justice to the *Pandavas*. In fact, as we have noted earlier, the *Pandavas* under the leadership of their elder brother *Yudhishtira* had almost decided to avoid war by renouncing their claim to the kingdom. It was *Krishna* who in order to root out evil and establish *Dharma* that he would not allow the *Pandavas* to abandon their claim.

Further *Duryodhana's* obduracy was strengthened by his firm belief that with *Bhishma*, *Drona*, *Kripa*, *Karna*, and *Ashwathama* on his side and with *Krishna's* vow not to participate in actual fighting in the war, success was his.

Krishna : The Statesman : *Duryodhana*, seeing that *Krishna* is the impediment in his evil design, had made all preparations to arrest him. But *Krishna* was more than a match for him in sagacity and statesmanship. He knew that *Duryodhana* would use all means at his command to harm him and also the cause for which he had stood for during his life. When it was announced that *Krishna* would come to the court of *Dhritarashtra* as the ambassador of peace to plead for the cause

of the righteous *Pandavas*, many kings of different regions of India had assembled at the court to show *Krishna* his place in that assembly. These kings knew that *Krishna* had killed *Kamsa* his maternal uncle for his unkingly behaviour with his subjects. Most of these kings were autocrats in their kingdoms and the life of ordinary peace-loving citizens was not safe under their rule.

They had, therefore, come to the Kaurava court not as friends of *Duryodhana* but as enemies of *Krishna*.

Krishna had therefore come fully prepared and in an armoured war chariot. As an additional precaution, he had taken with him the *Yādava* commander-in-chief and his friend *Satyaki*. Another *Yadava* commander *Kritavarmā* was also on the spot with his two lacs of soldiers apparently to fight on the side of the *Kauravas* if ultimately the peace mission of *Krishna* failed. But they would certainly have prevented *Duryodhana* from arresting *Krishna* when he had come as an ambassador of peace.

This army of two lacs of *Yadavas* was to fight on the side of *Duryodhana* with *Krishna*'s consent. When the first peace mission had failed, *Duryodhana* had been to *Dwaraka*, to seek *yadava*'s help. It was the custom then that whoever came first seeking for such help, such a request was not to be refused. Moreover *Duryodhana* was the son-in-law of *Balarama* the elder brother of *Krishna* himself.

Dhritarashtra had planned to receive *Krishna* and put him comfortably in the palace of his second son *Duhshasana*. But *Krishna* when he was received by *Dhritarashtra* in his court hastened to tell him that he would immediately like to call on his aunt *Kunti* the mother of the *Pandavas* who was then residing with *Vidura* the Prime-Minister of *Dhritarashtra*. *Vidura* was a statesman of high order and was convinced that justice lay with the *Pandavas*. *Krishna* had thus chosen to stay at *Vidura*'s house the safest place for him then.

Vidura was surprised to find that *Krishna* had taken very great risk in coming to *Hastinapura* at that time when the whole atmosphere there was hostile to him. He had apprised *Yudhishthira* of the atmosphere at the Kaurava's court and had told him bluntly that war was then unavoidable. He further added : "*ato nūnam Kṣatriyānām vināśaḥ* - now indeed the race of *kshatriyas* would be wiped out in war."

It is not that *Vidura* wanted the war. He wanted to avoid it, but not at the cost of justice.

Krishna : The Ambassador of peace : *Krishna* was welcomed at *Hastinapura* with great fan-fare. He was taken in procession to the court of *Dhritarashtra*. He met all the kings and other dignitaries assembled there. The grand-father *Bhishma* and the great teacher *Drona* were personally heading this procession. He tactfully avoided the invitations

of the *Emperor* Dhritrashtra and others to stay with them in all comforts. He hastened to the house of *Vidura* where his aunt was staying. Under the pretext of seeing her, he preferred to stay with *Vidura*.

Next day *Shakuni* the king of *Gandhara*, the maternal uncle of *Duryodhana* and villain of the piece, came to invite him and take him to the court. *Krishna* praised *Shakuni* for the great reception accorded to him and went with him to the court. *Vidura*, as a precaution, went along with *Krishna* in the same chariot. He was afraid that this villain might do some harm to the ambassador of peace.

When *Krishna* arrived at the court, *Duryodhana* was not there. He was engaged in hatching a plot to arrest *Krishna* under some pretext. But he saw that his plans would not work. So with a smile on his face, he came to the court to accost him. *Krishna* seeing him coming, went a few steps forward and exchanged with him some pleasantries.

When they sat together, *Duryodhana* opened the subject matter of peace with the *Pandavas* and very cordially invited him to his palace for food. *Krishna* at once told him that, as an ambassador of the *Pandavas*, it was not proper for him to accept his invitation for food. Then he bluntly said : 'you are looking at me as your enemy, not-with-standing your vehement denial. I don't like your machinations to deny justice to the *Pandavas*. I am not your personal enemy. You are son-in-law of my beloved elder brother *Balrama*. Then how can I wish you evil? But let me tell you, I am the arch enemy of your evil ways.'

Because of this plain talk *Duryodhana* decided not to visit him again for further talks. But when he saw that all the Kings and statesmen assembled there, wanted him to participate in the talks, he had reluctantly attended the court the next day, when serious talks were opened by *Krishna* with the Emperor. *Krishna* addressed *Dhritrashtra* thus : "O *Dhritrashtra*! Beware of your actions. You have not taken so far one positive step towards the good of the *Pandavas* who are the rightful owners of the Empire on which you are presiding. You talk sweet and as a reasonable man. But your actions belie your words. If you let go this opportunity, the ruin of both would be inevitable."

To *Bhishma* and *Drona* he had addressed thus : "If you cannot prevent the war, it would be improper for you both to fight on behalf of these evil-doers. Why don't you take positive and decisive steps to prevent this impending holocaust?" He further added : "Oh! *Bhishma*, there are only two persons present here, who can prevent this war. They are, you or I." *Bhishma* had taken a certain position to maintain the status quo. He knew justice was on *Pandava's* side. But he felt it was too late in the day, to change his position and be openly on the side of the *Pandava's*. His mind was not as free as that of *Krishna*.

At this stage, *Dhruitarashtra* intervened and presented a poser to *Krishna* : 'Why don't you, you a wise man and a friend of both the sides, stop this impending war?'

Krishna said, as if waiting for this opportunity : 'Oh! you wily creature! You know that truth and justice are on the *Pandavas*' side, and yet blinded by your desire to project your wicked sons as the rightful, heirs to the throne, you have not taken a single step to prevent your sons from adopting a wrongful course. You, in the garb of a righteous man, are leading a demonic life.' At such a blunt and devastating delineation of his character, *Dhritarashtra* had to hold his peace. But when pressed by *Krishna* to give his verdict in the matter, *Dhritarashtra* admitted, "my sons are certainly of vicious character, and they don't listen to me. I am helpless before them."

Then *Krishna* turned to *Duryodhana* and asked him about his decision in the matter. He reminded him that in the war, he would be nowhere before *Arjuna* or *Bhima*. He and his associates had been defeated several times earlier in the encounters they had with these two *Pandavas*.

But *Duryodhana* would not budge an inch from his position. He argued : "Our position is just and proper. It is not our fault when *Yudhusthira* lost all due to his impassioned love for the game of dice. He was inefficient in it and yet he foolishly staked every thing in it. He has lost his claim to the empire. Who can now help him?"

Krishna in reply told him : "This is not the *Kshatriya* way. You invited him for dice-play and took advantage of his weakness. This is not righteousness. It does not behove you now to talk of *Dharma* when you were the party to insult the Empress *Draupadi*, to drag her to the court and misbehave with her. Moreover, you are a party to the condition of the wager that if the *Pandavas* come out of their ordeal of thirteen years exile successfully, you have to restore to the *Pandavas* their half of the kingdom."

Duryodhana was terribly upset at this accusation. Before he would say or do anything he was dragged out of the court by his friends.

Krishna then told the elders in the assembly to take steps to put *Duryodhana* in jail and prevent this avoidable holocaust. He pointed out that he had killed *Kamsa* and established peace amongst the *Yādavas*. They all could do the same.

At this *Duryodhana* instigated his men to arrest *Krishna*. He told them, there is nothing untoward in arresting a man who in his own court wanted him to be arrested.

Krishna assured of support from *Satyaki* and *Kritavarma* the *Yadava* commanders present in the court boldly told those assembled : "Is

it proper to arrest an ambassador of peace? You are not kshatriyas and are not fit to be rulers. This is not the civilised way to talk about the arrest of an ambassador of peace.”

Krishna's position in the matter was unassailable in the eyes of other assembled Kings and statesmen. They could not muster courage to arrest *Duryodhana* the Emperor's eldest son, but at the same time they could not think of wrong action and arrest *Krishna* who was earlier worshipped as 'leaving God' at the time of *Rajasuya* Sacrifice.

Krishna's tactical successess : Though *Krishna's* mission to bring about peace between the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* had failed, yet it had succeeded in implanting firmly in the minds of *Bhishma*, *Drona* and others that justice lay on the side of the *Pandavas*. This made a deep scar in the mind of these elder statesmen and weakened their resolve to fight vigorously on the side of *Duryodhana*.

Krishna achieved another tactical success. He took aside *Karna* the bravest and the statunchest ally of *Duryodhana* and told him the secret of his birth. *Karna* had no personal grudge against the *Pandavas*. He had to suffer defeat at the hands of the *Pandavas* but those battles were not of his making. They were imposed on him by *Duryodhana*, his friend. He had been humiliated by *Draupadi* in her *swayamvara* bridegroom-choosing function. But since then he had developed hatred against *Arjuna* the bravest of the *Pandavas*. He therefore, assured *Krishna*, that he would not fight against any other *Pandavas* than *Arjuna*.

Without *Krishna*, the *Pandavas* would never have fought the war or won it. They won the war and the *Paurava* (*Pandava*) dynasty ruled as Emperors of India for almost thousand years. Theirs was a righteous rule. In fact till the advent of the muslims on the scene, the rulers in India by and large were guided by the rules of righteousness laid down by *Krishna*. Even the wars were fought according to certain norms and set rules agreed upon by both the sides.

It should now be clear to all why *Krishna* had been regarded as Godhead even during his life time and why he continues to be so viewed even today. He was a perfect man in all its mainfold implications. He was cast as an ideal man in all its aspects. Let us trace his charismatic career from his childhood to the end of his earthly sojourn. His life and his teachings are the cultural foundations of India.

His Childhood : *Krishna* was the eighth son of *Vasudeva* and *Devaki*, born on 8th *Sravan* black fortnight (August of the Gregorian Calendar, 125 years prior to *Kali*, approximately or 3227 B.C., at 12 p.m. on the *Abhijita* constellation. *Kali* was ushered in 3102 B.C. He was born in captivity of his parents. The story of their imprisonment by *Vasudeva's* own brother-in-law *Kamsa* needs to be told hereafter.

Vasudeo, Krishna's father, was the son of Shurasena a prominent leader of Vrishni-Sangha (republic founded by the Vrishnis). There were two republics founded by the Yadu dynasty, one Andhaka and the other Vrishni. But they were federated into one for the purpose of administration. It is wrong to suppose the two dynasties Andhak or Vrishni to be nomadic tribes. They were quite civilized and organised into well-founded republics. Agriculture was their mainstay. They belonged to Yadu dynasty founded by the son of Yayati the Kshatriya king and Devayani the daughter of Shukracharya the revered teacher of the Danavas. The *Andhaka* chief was *Ugrasena* with his head-quarters at *Mathura*. *Ugrasena*'s daughter *Sutanu* was married to *Akrura* one of the leaders of the *Vrishnis*. His brother's daughter *Devaki* was married to *Vasudeo* another *Vrishni* leader. Of the two, *Vasudeo* was of scrupulously clean conduct. He never compromised his principles even if he had to lay down his life in the process. *Akrura* his brother-in-law although inclined to righteousness was not as selfless as *Vasudeo*. But the two together were carrying on the administration of the republic of *Vrishni* along well-regulated lines for the benefit of their people. *Ugrasena* of the *Andhakas* was also a pious leader. The republics of *Andhaka* and *Vrishni* families were therefore ideal ones, in those ancient times.

Jarasandha was the Emperor with his capital at *Rajagriha* in the then *Magadha* State (Modern Bihar). He was a very powerful monarch and had established his hegemony by subduing about 86 kings ruling in different parts of India. He was not able to conquer the republics of the *Audhakas* and the *Vrishnis* as these two were pulling their resources together and were determined to preserve their independence against *Jarasandha*'s hegemonistic ambitions.

Sensing that these two republics together were a source of danger to his Imperial designs, *Jarasandha* decided to follow the strategy of 'divide and rule.' He won over *Kamsa* the son of *Ugrasena* to his side by giving him his two daughters *Asti* and *Prāpti*. *Kamsa* now became a very powerful person as his strength increased hundred-fold with the Emperor *Jarasandha* as his father-in-law. As *Ugrasena* refused to crown him as his prince and successor, *Kamsa* took over the administration of *Mathura* as king and imprisoned *Ugrasena* the republican chief and his father. He made *Akrura* his brother-in-law and one of the leaders of *Vrishnis* as his accomplice in the matter and arrested *Vasudeo* as he was not so pliable and put him behind the bars.

This act created large-scale unrest and upheaval amongst the republicans of *Mathura*. But, as their leader *Akrura*, who was still free, refused to lead the revolt against *Kamsa*, the people became dispirited and were reconciled to their fate. *Kamsa* now became secure in his belief that he can rule his kingdom riding roughshod over the feelings of his subjects.

Naradā a sage and a statesman of very high order, could not be reconciled to the discomfiture of the people. He recognized that this way the people would lose the urge for independence of spirit, the ground state for the flowering of human genius. He, therefore, adopted a strategem. He met Kamsa and discussed the political situation. He opined that so long as Vasudeo and his sons would remain alive, they would organize and lead a revolt against him.

Kamsa's love for his sister Devaki prevented him from killing Vasudeo, who was otherwise a very lovable and respected creature. He, therefore, decided on a plan to kill all his sons. Actually he had by then killed seven of his sons. The jailor and the guards were very much incensed at this. But they could not find a way out of this impasse. It appears that Vasudeo through his confidants was in league with Nanda a leader of the nearby prosperous locality called Gokul. The residents of this village were chiefly cowherds and supplied milk and other products to Mathura, Kamsa's Capital. Vasudeo and Nanda agreed to exchange their young ones as soon as they were born. As chance would have it, when Krishna was born, he was taken out of the prison secretly and carried to Nanda's house in Gokul. The jailors and guards of the prison were obviously accomplices in this act.

Narada was a Prajapati one of the first offsprings of Brahma the creator. He flourished at the beginning of this Kalpa-Vārāha about 29000 B.C. He had established a seat or Pitha a university for the spread of good and righteous thoughts amongst the masses. The method was to perform kirtanas, teaching of the virtues of good life through the medium of dance-drama and music. This was a one-man show. The chief teacher of this Pitha is called Narada. This institution flourishes even to this day.

Yashoda the wife of Nanda when she gave birth to a daughter was unable to bear the pangs of labour and had perhaps gone in a coma. at the moment of the birth of her child. Nanda and Vasudeo exchanged the new born babes and kept their secret. They had expected that Kamsa out of compassion for the young girl, would not kill her as he had done with the other seven sons of Vasudeo and Devaki. Kamsa's plan was to kill all the male children of Vasudeo and this he had carried out thus far. But that monster as soon as he learnt of the birth of a girl rushed to the prison and killed the new-born, despite the entreaties of Vasudeo and the piteous wails of Devaki reverberating in the sombre and serene morning atmosphere.

After killing the girl, Kamsa himself was seized with remorse for his monstrous acts of killing eight young new-born babies. He fell at the feet of Devaki and begged her pardon (Harivansh-Vishnupurana 5-56). I have noted this act of Kamsa to show that even the demonic

beings in India were not so cruel and heartless as the Muslim theologians and invaders. They would perpetrate such heinous acts in the name of religion. Kamsa's motive in killing the eight new-born babies, was pure and simple self-defence. It was ofcourse not pardonable. He was inviting the death penalty for his anti-people acts.

Vasudeo's two sons, Balaram born earlier to his another wife Rohini and Krishna born to Devaki, were being brought up in *Gokul* under their fosterparents *Nanda* and *Yashoda*.

In *Harivansha*, the story of incessant rain during that night and consequential flooding of the river *Yamuna* and new-born baby's super-human act of touching the flood-water so that *Vasudeo* would get a clear way through the flooded river is not given. This story appears in *Bhagavata Purana* which has attributed all sorts of miraculous powers to this living god. *Harivansha's* narration is historical and so more reliable.

Krishna's bodily form : As a child, Krishna was very healthy and attractive. His beauty is described in the most superlative terms. It is stated मनुष्यलोके कृत्स्ने अपि रूपे नास्ति कृष्णसमं भुवि "*Manushya loke kṛtsne api rupe nāsti kṛṣṇasamam bhuvi* – in the whole of the world, there was none who could excel Krishna's bodily form." His colour is said to partake of the quality of "*tapta-kāncan-varṇābhaḥ* – a molten gold." It was yellowish red. Many translate epithet – '*Meghavarnam* – colour like a cloud, – applied to the colour of his skin as 'darkskinned'. This is not true. *Meghavarnam* here means, exceedingly beautiful and attractive as a huge and bright cloud.

He was endowed with all the superhuman qualities in the most superlative degree. In his later life, he had been recognised as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This was so because he was supremely attractive. One becomes attractive if one possesses superabundant wealth; or if one is a very powerful person. Again worldwide fame due to some extra-ordinary feats of bravery or talent may also attract millions of person to such a one. An extremely beautiful complexion and features also endow one with a magnetic personality. A man possessed of wisdom in a superlative degree or a renunciate of a very high order, will also become a centre of attraction. But in Krishna all these six viz 1. wealth, 2. power, 3. fame, 4. beauty, 5. wisdom, and 6. renunciation, were present in an unequalled degree. *Krishna* is a historical person who appeared about 5000 years ago. He was simultaneously wealthy, powerful, famous, beautiful, wise and unattached and that too in an unlimited degree. He was born as a human being and met with death like an ordinary mortal. But he was a genius of a very high order and his activities were unparalleled. He got success in every undertaking that came his way, through his right action at the right time. He was an ideal person and would initiate all his actions with an eye on future.

Because of these exceptional qualities and abilities he has been regarded as an incarnation of god.

His Childhood acts : Even as a child, it is said that he accomplished miraculous deeds 1. While he was yet a child of less than a year, and was sleeping under a cart and his foster-mother *Yashoda* had been to *Yamuna* to have her bath; just then *Krishna* awoke. Seized by the pangs of hunger, he began to cry loudly throwing his hands and feet hither and thither. His actions were so violent that the cart under which he was sleeping overturned and fell a few feet away. *Yashoda*, hearing the loud cries of her son, came running thither and saw the cart with its load overturned and its contents of earthen pots of milk and curds all broken. She felt that it must have been due to fierce gale around. But finding no trace of it and afraid that her young son might have received some injury, took him to her breast and pacified him.

Nanda the foster-father came and saw the cart and its contents broken. He felt that this must be the act of the bullocks fighting in his absence. But the other grown-up children playing around assured the parents that the cart was overturned because of the kicks of baby *Krishna*. The news spread with the speed of wind amongst the inmates of *Gokul*. Instantly *Krishna* became the centre of their attraction.

2. One night *Putana* a wet maid-servant of *Kamsa* came to *Gokul* to kill *Krishna* by offering her poisoned breasts. But surprisingly *Krishna* was safe but the maid servant fell dead, as her breasts were bruised by sharp teeth of *Krishna* and the poison applied to her breast became injected in her blood and she instantly died. It appears, when he felt the bitter taste of the breast milk in his mouth, *Krishna* became violent and cut into her breasts.

The pastimes of *Krishna* as a child are many and are still relished in many house-holds all over India. Not only to the devout, but also to the materially inclined, child *Krishna's* childish pranks, played on boys and girls of his age, are most appealing. Even the attraction between grown up *Krishna* and the *Gopies* (daughters of the cowherds) was of transcendently blissful nature though to the ordinary lay reader may appear materialistic and sensual. There is nothing sensual about *Gopies'* love for *Krishna* for then he was hardly of 9 years. *Krishna Katha* is equally palatable to every human being in whatever condition of life he is, except to the perverted.

3. The next incident in child *Krishna's* life is the death of the demon *Triṇāvarta* at his hands. This demon raised a dust storm in *Gokul* and carried away the child *Krishna* blinding his mother *Yashoda* and others with dust. But *Krishna* became so heavy that the demon could not get out of his clutches and fell dead crushed as he was under *Krishna's* mountain-like pressure.

4. Again once while *Yashoda* was nurshing him with her breast-milk she opened the mouth of *Krishna* with her fingers and to her surprise she saw the whole universe manifested in his mouth.

Whatever may be the truth in these stories, one thing is clear that *Krishna* was a very very attractive boy and he had miraculously escaped unhurt through many calamities which had befallen him.

5. As a child *Krishna* was very naughty and playful. He would collect young boys and girls round him, and would break the milk and curd pots and eat and drink from them. If somebody would try to catch them, they would run in different directions, smiling, laughing and singing.

One day fed up with his pranks, *Yashoda*, tried to bind him to a big stone mortar. With great difficulty she could do so. She then said, "Let me see how you can now run from hither?" While *Yashoda* was engaged in her routine work, *Krishna* began pulling himself along with the mortar towards the bank of *Yamuna*. On his way, the mortar got stuck between two big *Arjuna* trees. He, now with redoubled vigour, began his onward movement. In the processs these two trees got uprooted and they fell down covering him. The Gopies, hearing the big thud-thud sound of the falling trees, were seized with the fear that their beloved *Krishna* might have got crushed under these trees. They ran to *Yashoda* carrying this terrible news. When they all arrived on the scene, to their dismay they found the boy with his two hands on the two trees, smiling and making faces at them.

With such ceaseless activities of many sorts, the child *Krishna* grew into a handsome and still more attractive young boy. The young boys and girls were simply mad after him. The young men and women of *Gokul* would not like to miss the *Darshan* (Holysight) of *Krishna* even for a day. The old ones wanted *Krishna* always to be playing near about them. The whole *Gokul-land* had identified itself with *Krishna*. All talks and thoughts in *Gokul* centred round *Krishna*. All the *Gokul*-inmates thought *Krishna* to be their very life-breath.

One thing about *Krishna* which the citizens of *Gokul* had witnessed was his fearlessness, his muscle strength and his mental alertness.

Kaliya-subdued : Yet with all the calamities befallen on *Krishna* and his miraculous escapes unscathed through all of these, the elders felt that *Gokul* was not safe place for them to stay with *Krishna*. His presence here was daily attracting some one or the other to harm them. They decided to shift with all their bags and baggages to the newly developed town of *Vrindavana* on the other bank of *Yamuna*, a little further away from *Mathura*. They had all been convinced that *Kamsa* was determined to torture *Gokul* as it sheltered *Balarama* and *Krishna*. *Kamsa* had developed a suspicion that his sister's son was thriving in *Gokul*.

But their troubles were not over even in *Vrindavana*. Here one demon *Vatsasura* in the form of a fierce-looking calf of a cow and the other *Bakasura* in the form of a big duck, had attacked *Krishna*. But instead of killing him, they themselves were killed through the skill and the prowess of the boy *Krishna*.

We may pass over the other episodes wherein *Krishna* had exhibited his undoubted abilities in suppressing the evil ones and touch an important event during his boyhood, namely the subduing of *Kaliya* the serpent-King who had poisoned the waters of a lake in *Yamuna* nearby. Due to the poisonous effects of the water vapour there, the trees and grass on the nearby bank of *Yamuna* had all dried up. *Krishna* decided to rid the lake of *Kaliya*. He, therefore, climbed a nearby *kadamb* tree which had escaped pollution somehow and jumped in the midst of the waters of the poisonous lake. We need not doubt the courage and self-confidence which *Krishna* possessed in superabundant degree. We have been witness to his muscle strength and prowess and skill in manoeuvring situations.

Kaliya was living peacefully in the lake and did not expect anybody would dare to disturb his peace. It was, therefore surprised, when some one like an elephant was splashing the waters with great strength. The serpent, infuriated as it was, came out of its seat deep in the waters and gripped the small boy into its coils.

When the news spread that *Krishna* had dared *Kaliya* to a battle with him, the whole of *Vrindavan*, men and women, young and old, boys and girls, the gopis with their young ones clasping around their necks assembled there, to witness this ghastly scene. When they found *Krishna* remaining gripped in the coils of *Kaliya*, many of the women including *Yashoda* fainted. Everyone was dumb-founded and could not think of doing anything in the matter. They could not enter the polluted waters, nor could they do anything to loosen the grip of *Kaliya* around *Krishna*. They had deep love and devotion for *Krishna*, but what could they do in that strange predicament? Nobody had an answer. Not only women, young and old, but even men bravest among them, began to feel that the end of the world had come.

Under the leadership of *Nanda* they all decided to enter the waters of the lake. Just then *Balaram* saw that *Krishna* was more than a match for *Kaliya* and was desperately trying to loosen *Kaliya's* grip. And to the delight of all, *Krishna* had by then freed himself from the deadly embrace of that demon. *Kaliya* had become quite exhausted. It tried to take an opportunity to bite him, but *Krishna* began moving round it in a circle. And at the opportune moment pressed down the serpent's hoods and jumped upon them. With innumerable blows on the hoods, *Kaliya* became unconscious. After a while the serpent

regained consciousness and begged of *Krishna* to allow it to go to the ocean with all its family members. *Krishna*, the love incarnate as he was, allowed *Kaliya* to leave the waters and the lake was freed from all poisonous pollution.

Krishna's love for Gopis : We may relate here one of the most illuminating stories throwing flood of light on young *Krishna*'s playfulness and character. *Balarama* and *Krishna* as they grew up were given independent charge of tending the cows along with other cowherds, *Krishna* was naturally their uncrowned leader. As the forest flowers bloomed and bees and drones hummed jubilant, *Krishna* added new dimension to this reverberating atmosphere, the heart-catching vibrations of his flute. With his expert playing of the flute, the Gopis – young cowherd maidens – were captivated by the sound vibrations. The sweetness of the flute was so attractive that even the animals kept listening to the sweet sound forgetting to eat grass or drink water. All the inmates of *Vrindavana* would, as if, enjoy the *Samadhi* while *Krishna* played on his flute.

No wonder the young *Gopis* would always remain absorbed in thoughts of *Krishna*.

It is the custom, with the young girls from age ten to fourteen, in India to worship Lord *Shiva* or *Durga* to get a nice and suitable husband. In the month of *Margashirsha* such a month-long worship of the goddess *Durga* is performed.

The young girls of *Vrindavana* used to go to the banks of *Yamuna* and have a bath in the river completely naked. That part of the river was a prohibited area for the grown up boys and young men. What else could be the object of these Gopi girls in worshipping the Goddess except to get some one like *Krishna* as their husband? *Krishna* at that time was of the same age as that of the girls engrossed in worship. He was hardly 12 to 13 years and the girls' ages ranged between 13 to 16. Moreover, he was a *Yogeshwara* – the Supreme controller of his senses. From his childhood, he had exhibited in ample measure his prowess both in muscle and brain power. When he sensed that all these girls wanted him or some one like him to be their husband, in a playful mood, he entered that prohibited area, collected all their garments left on the bank while they were enjoying their bath in the river *Yamuna* completely naked, and went over to a nearby *Kadamba* tree and sat there playing on his flute.

When the girls became aware of *Krishna*'s presence and the loss of their garments, they, in fact, were very much pleased for they were already in love with him. At the same time, they could not come out of water for they were naked. So they begged of *Krishna* to deliver to them their garments. *Krishna* would not listen to them. He kept on saying that they should come out of water in the state

they were, and beg of him their particular garments. For, was he not their playmate and also their master? He said, "you want me to be your husband, then why do you feel shy to come to me naked?" He further said, "When you say that you are my eternal servitors, why don't you obey as I bid?" The girls realised that their lusty attitude towards him is what he resented. They were, therefore, overpowered with devotion for him. Thus purified of lust, they could come out of water without feeling shy and cover themselves with the garments taken away from them earlier by *Krishna*.

They were taught the first lesson in the control of their sensual desires. This episode is however not found in *Harivamsha*. This is recorded in *Bhagwata Purana*, composed for the sole purpose of glorifying *Krishna* as the supreme personality of Godhead. In *Bhagavata Purana* all such love stories are essentially of transcendental nature.

Govardhana worship : All the residents of Vrindavana, young and old, had by now developed implicit faith in the soundness of judgement of *Krishna*. They felt that *Krishna* would not say or do anything which was not for their collective good. At the same time *Krishna's* attitude towards the elders was submissive. He would listen to them attentively and put forward his view-point cogently and convincingly. He would also listen to his playmates and take their view-points into consideration before arriving at the final conclusion. He would himself abide by the consensus thus developed.

This feature of his nature is fully seen reflected in his bid to replace the age old Vedic ritual of worshipping *Indra*.

The agriculturists used to perform a sacrifice to propitiate Lord *Indra*, the Vedic raingod. This was done in midrainy-season. The elders told *Krishna* that this sacrifice was arranged to pacify god *Indra*, who in his unbounded grace gave them water so that they can have successful agricultural operations. This ritual, they felt, developed in them the religious attitude of submission to the powers that be. At the same time they had economic development through adequate production of food, cotton and other items like wood and fodder. This was a traditional activity and it was in their interest to follow such a tradition. *Krishna's* argument against this traditional worship was : "Well! *Indra* does whatever duty is assigned to him. We should do whatever is assigned to us. We are cowherds and tend the cows. If at all worship is to be offered, let us offer it to the cows and to the nearby mountain Govardhana, our daily resort. This is just and proper. The Brahmanas perform worship in the form of learning different sciences and arts and imparting them to those who come to them. Similarly it is our duty to cultivate lands and bring up the cows in a satisfactory way. That is worship of *Indra*. Govardhana worship is also cultivation around the mountain and plantation of trees on it in replacement of the felled ones."

His plea was to discard meaningless rituals and replace them by concrete works performing these with a worshipful attitude.

It became really difficult for the elders including Nanda to discontinue the tradition. But by now Krishna's influence over all the residents was such that they could not resist Krishna's pleas. Moreover, the local youngsters were all for *Krishna*. The elders, therefore, relented and celebrated the cow and Govardhana worship with great eclat.

Thereafter this festival of worship of the cows has become an annual feature of the cultivators all over India.

As if in retaliation of the stoppage of the worship, Lord Indra caused devastating rainfall and inundated all the lands in and around Govardhana and Vrindavana, at least so the elders of Vrindavana felt. But they all had faith in *Krishna* and so approached *Krishna* to find out the way out of this calamity.

Krishna had scoured the environs of Vrindavana and Govardhana several times, very intensively. He therefore, had detailed knowledge of all the places in these regions. He made immediate arrangements to move the men, women and children, and all the animals to the caves and the other covered places where they could have shelter from wind and rain. He also engaged the youth and other able-bodied persons to dig trenches and build bunds to ward off the on-rush of flood waters. He converted the Govardhana as if it was an umbrella to protect all the inmates of Vrindavana from incessant rain and consequential floods. The caves and crevices in it were turned into storehouses and kitchens. All were stunned and dazzled at the organising skill and indefatigable energy displayed by *Krishna*. The epic-writers and poets have described this feat of *Krishna* as if he himself was a big and tall boulder-like column on which Govardhan was held stable in its place and all the inmates had been sheltered under it. This column later on became *Krishna*'s rock-like finger on which Govardhana was stead-fastly held. This is the way myths develop around a charismatic figure : In the epics, *Krishna* has acquired the epithet, Govardhanadhari, holder of Govardhana on his little finger.

After a few days of heavy and incessant down-pour, the rains stopped and the sky became clear. The Sun shone brightly and the strong winds stopped. All heaved a sigh of relief and again moved to their respective dwellings after repairing the damage done to them due to the unprecedented rains during the earlier week.

Now the one topic for discussion in and around Vrindavana was who is *Krishna*? What really he is? Is he the God Himself? How can he otherwise perform such wonderful feats unheard of in the annals of history of man? They were hypnotized by his super-human activities.

They began recounting his performances since he was a child only a few months old. He had overturned the cart he was sleeping under by his kicks. He had killed the demoness Putana. He had subdued Kaliya. And now he could protect them from the fury of the winds and rains.

RASAKRIDA : Nanda now recalled the prophesies of the sage Garga who had performed the 'Naming ceremony of Krishna'. He was told that Krishna was Lord Narayana Himself and none else. The Gopis were jubilant at this and they began chanting his names as if he was really Lord Vishnu. They called him Govinda – the Lord of cows, the master cowherd. Whenever they could get the opportunities, the Gopis caught hold of Balarama and Krishna and would dance to their heart's fill. This is described as Rasa-Krida the dance of supreme abandon by the young boys and girls. Imagine the boy about ten years old being regarded as their husband by the Gopis who were already married to others. This husband – Krishna – is not an ordinary husband wedded to a woman. He is the master who had taken complete control of the mind of the young and old women of Vrindavana. There cannot be the carnal desire to enjoy sex with a boy of ten and that too simultaneously with all the women assembled for the dance. When the poets go into ecstasies in describing this supreme joy felt by all the young women at the dance, they compare it to the uncommon bliss these feel at the supreme moment of sex act. But there can not be anything physical about it. It is the transcendental pleasure that these women were enjoying in the company of the boy named Krishna. We have the example of young Rajput queen Mira of the eighteenth century, who used to dance in the temple of Krishna at Vrindavana calling Krishna as her husband and forgetting that she was married to the King of the day. She used to be lost in singing the glory of the Lord.

As we have already seen, Krishna was the Supreme Controller of his senses, Yogeshwara and so he had no sex relations with any woman, except his lawfully wedded wives. He had eight wives, and he had to marry them all under compelling circumstances. In his later life, it is stated that he was the husband of sixteen thousand women placed in captivity by the King Naraka of Pragjyotishpur (present Assama). When Krishna killed the demon Naraka and freed the helpless young women from his prison, they were brought to the presence of Krishna. When they saw him they were captivated by the extraordinary personality of Krishna. Harivamsa states that they instantly felt that they should take him as their husband (64-31 सर्वासामेव संकल्पः पतित्वेन अभवत् ततः । *Sarvāsāmeva sankalpaḥ patitvena abhavat tatah*). But they were not actually married to him. It may be that these unfortunate damsels once they were taken prisoners by Naraka, even after their freedom were either unwilling to go to their parents or the parents were reluctant to take them

back as their daughters and so they preferred to consider Krishna to be their protector. Here the word *pati* (usually stands for husband) means protector and not lawfully wedded husband.

The poetic description of Krishna— 'though husband of sixteen thousand and eight young women, he remained a child celibate'— in apt words brings out his mental state of being the *Lord Controller* of sense desires.

This Rāsa-dance in the dead of night on a full moonday of the month of Kartika (November) with all young women of Vrindavana with Krishna about ten years old, cannot in any sense be regarded as one of sexual orgy.

In a detached manner Krishna would tell the assembled Gopis only to think of him and not to come near him any more for dance. The Gopis immediately would become dejected. They said : "How cruel you are! We are pining for your presence near us and you are asking us to move away without caring for our sentiments. We are your devotees. This way we are part of you. We cannot remain separate from you. Nor can we be separated from you. You are our most dear person. We do not care for our mother, father, son, brother and sister. We love you above everything else. We therefore appeal to you not to kill our long-cherished desire to have you as our protector."

Krishna would at once melt by this exceptional and one-pointed devotion for him. He then would join them all in dance. His touch was a sweet nectar to them all. They embraced him, kissed him, patted him, and made him dance over their heads and shoulders. They had their fill of his nearness on the long sandy bank of the Yamuna with fullbloomed lotuses and lilies. They enjoyed his company without a tinge of material sex-passion.

While the Gopis were basking in moon light of Krishna's presence, one day he somehow disappeared from their midst, without the Gopis knowing his hiding place. They felt that Krishna had particular fascination for Radha – the most beautiful Gopi in Vrindavana, and so he must have been hiding with her under some flower creeper. But they soon discovered that she was also weeping in a corner intensely feeling his absence.

They then began singing his glories and earnestly imploring Krishna to reappear before them. He answered their call and again began mixing and dancing playfully with them. They danced and sang to their hearts content. The Gopis were at last tired and the whole revelry came to an end.

Some may feel that this act of Krishna in mixing with young girls and dancing with them in the dead of night, though shorn of sex-desire, yet was against decorum and the established rules of Vedic religion and tradition.

What they forget is that Vedic religion does not prohibit material enjoyment or dancing or singing. On the other hand, it encourages merry-making, outing at holy places, dancing in ecstasy, all the while not forgetting the presence of God amongst them. The man's personality should be developed to the full and manifested in all its glory. Immersed in Krishna one should make one's life sublime and fruitful. This is the central message of Vedic religion.

Bull and horse subdued : Thus even when Vrindavana had become completely Krishna-conscious, there were demons around who were bent on disturbing the peace of that affluent and blissful land. Many evil-minded persons were coming over there in different forms and creating trouble and showering misery on the inmates. Krishna had now become virtually their ruler, and all such trouble was immediately reported to him. He would take appropriate steps and ward it off.

One day a terrible bull rushed into Vrindavana and began attacking the cattle there. It was sent by Kamsa and his henchmen. It killed many and created a havoc amongst the cowherds. Krishna decided to fight with the bull. When the demon bull saw Krishna, it pointed its horns at him and began to charge at him. Krishna jumped on its horns and held them so fast and tight that the bull became infuriated and began bellowing shrilly. But Krishna would not loosen his grip. At last the bull lost its strength and fell to the ground. Krishna by giving twists and turns to the head, wrenched its life out of it.

Many such stories went to the ears of Kamsa the King of nearby Mathura. He had sent many demonic figures to kill Krishna and his brother Balarama. One day his spies got the news that Krishna was Vasudeva's eighth son and Balarama was also Vasudeva's son from his another wife Rohini. Kamsa was under the impression that he had killed Vasudeva's eighth child which was then stated to be a girl. Now he learnt to his surprise that these two youngsters were being brought up under the care of Nanda the leader of Gokul and Vrindavana. This information was also conveyed to him by the sage Narada.

He became terribly upset and wanted to kill Vasudeo instantly. But second thoughts prevailed on him and he said to himself, "Krishna and not Vasudeo is going to kill me." He however put Vasudeo and his wife Devaki behind the bars, shackling them in iron chains. Acting on this new information Kamsa sent a fierce demon named Kesi a horse to Vrindavana directing the rider to kill Krishna and Balarama both.

But those two youngsters were more than a match for a Kesi and its rider. Instead of killing them, they were killed in the encounter they had with Krishna and Balarama.

Krishna invited to Mathura : Kamsa then got alarmed at this feat of Krishna and Balarama. He, however, could not send his army to kill these two youngsters in cold blood without provocation. In the assembly of elders he was very harshly criticised for his demonic acts. He was advised to make peace with Krishna and Balarama. He instead thought of a plan to call these two to a wrestling match at Mathura. These matches were very popular then as they are even today particularly in the country side. Even in cities now, there are special arenas raised for the purpose.

He took Akrura, brother-in-law of himself as well as Vasudeo into confidence. Akrura though belonged to the same family as Vasudeo namely Vrishnis of Yadu dynasty, and was brought up in a republican atmosphere, that time became Kamsa's messenger and agreed to Kamsa's request to proceed to Vrindavana to fetch these two boys to Mathura for a wrestling bout.

When Akrura came to Vrindavana he met Krishna and his brother Balarama. He was also bewitched by the beauty, bearing and charismatic personality of both. It was love at first sight. He was beside himself with joy by the sight of these two boys. He spoke to them recounting the trials and tribulations their parents had undergone. He also apprised them of the discontent brewing in the whole of the Kingdom, against Kamsa. Thereupon Krishna and his brother agreed to accompany Akrura to Mathura. The whole of Vrindavana also decided to accompany these two darlings of its heart. When the Gopis and the other elderly ladies heard of the impending departure of Krishna, they immediately became dejected and began showering curses on Akrura. But the decision was taken by Krishna himself. Nobody could doubt the wisdom of the decision. By now they had all heard of the birth story of Krishna and Balarama. So they saw the purpose of this step. But their hearts were unwilling to stomach the grave loss they would incur by their separation from their beloved. With indescribable anguish of the heart, the Gopis bid farewell to their friend, philosopher and guide. The parting between them and the Gopis was no less heart rending to them both. Krishna and Balarama accompanied Akrura along with the boys and elders of Vrindavana.

They arrived at Mathura at the night fall. Akrura dared not take these two boys to their father's house. He took them to his house. The two, however, left together on sightseeing tour of Mathura.

Akrura pleased at his successful performance in persuading Nanda and Krishna to accompany him to Mathura at Kamsa's bidding, went to Kamsa and apprised him of the arrival of the two sons of Vasudeo. Akrura, it appears, was a party to Kamsa's plot.

On their peripatetic tour of Mathura, they came across a beautifully

decorated laundry shop run by a very haughty and egoistic washerman. They saw very aesthetically stiched and dyed clothes of exquisite quality hanging from the hangers in the shop. They just felt that they should have these and so begged of the launderer to part with them. At this strange request the washerman flared up and began abusing them in violent terms. He told them that these belonged to the King Kamsa and that those village urchins could expect these at their own peril. Krishna could not tolerate this gross abuse and hit him on the head. The poor washerman instantly died and his wife ran to Kamsa's palace to convey him the loss of her husband through the misdeed of the rustic villager.

Krishna did want to teach a lesson to the servants of Kamsa, so that he would be apprised of the determination of these two not to tolerate any more insults to them and to their parents.

They took those clothes and put them on. Thus richly and nicely attired they proceeded further. They met a florist. They sweetly accosted him and begged of him to give them a few garlands to wear. This he happily did; the florist was very richly rewarded for this good act.

As they proceeded further, they met a hunch-backed woman engaged in preparing sandal-paste for use in the King's palace. She proffered it to these youthful boys with unparalleled personality. Krishna pressed her feet with his toes and taking hold of her cheeks gave her a jerk and lo! she at once became a young woman of striking beauty. She then pressed Krishna to accept her hand in marriage. Krishna playfully patted her on the back and proceeded further.

Then they entered the King's palace grounds. A huge bow was kept on a specially raised platform decorated with many coloured flower garlands. They requested the guards to lead them to that bow for which celebrations were planned.

When they reached the place and saw the huge column-like bow, Krishna raised it and tied the bow-string to it. When he drew the bow in, it broke into two giving an ear-piercing sound. It reached Kamsa's ears. While Kamsa was enquiring about the cause of this roaring sound, the guards came running and acquainted him with this unbelievable feat performed by a strange person of incomparable beauty. The guards knew not who they were. Kamsa had already heard many stories about Krishna's astounding feats. With this direct revelation, he became nervous and all his heinous acts during his regime began staring him in the face. He could not get sleep that day. Krishna and Balarama retired to their cowherd camp for the night. Kamsa then ordered the huge wrestling arena to be decorated in an unprecedented manner. He had planned to kill these two boys by inviting them to the wrestling bout with his expert wrestlers namely Chanura and Mushtika

the next day. They were renowned for their prowess throughout the Kingdom and Kamsa was very sure of their skills and strength. He expected them to kill these boys in a wrestling bout.

Kamsa had invited all the prominent persons in all walks of life in his Kingdom, to witness this unique match. He had also ordered to keep the famous elephant Kuvalayapida of huge strength, ready at the gates of the arena. The plan was that as soon as the boys reached the gate of the arena Kuvalayapida was to charge at Krishna and Balarama and kill them. Kamsa had taken all possible precautions to see that next day morning these two sons of Vasudeo would be killed either by the elephant or by his wrestlers or ultimately by him.

Wrestling match arranged for Krishna and Balarama : On that fateful morning the trumpets blew announcing the start of the wrestling matches. Seats in different galleries were allotted to different types of invitees. For kings and noble-men and the priests special arrangements were made. All the cowherd men led by Nanda were also welcomed by Kamsa and were seated in a special gallery.

Kamsa finally came and took his seat on the raised central platform especially meant for him.

Krishna and Balarama also arrived at the gate of the camp, after finishing their morning ablutions. But their way was blocked by that big elephant tended by the caretaker. Krishna asked him to clear off the way. Instead of doing so, he provoked the elephant to attack these two boys. Krishna said : "He has been invited by the King and this is not the way to welcome them." But the caretaker would not listen. Krishna very dexterously moved behind the tusker. Climbed up, caught hold of the caretaker and violently threw him down. The caretaker instantly died. The elephant became uncontrolled and rushed madly towards Krishna. He escaped the attack, but skillfully caught hold of its trunk and pulled the elephant down. By the impact of its tusks running into the ground they were broken. Krishna and Balarama took out the tusks and began stabbing the elephant with them. Blood began oozing out of the body of the elephant and after a while the elephant died of the injuries sustained by it in the fight.

They at once became heroes and cynosures of the eyes of that huge assembly of men and women, young and old. They both entered the arena with their cowherd friends. The famous wrestler Chanura accosted Krishna and challenged him to a fight with him. Krishna replied : "We are just young boys and a fight with you and your companion Mushtika will be an unequal fight. It was against the rules of the game." But Chanura persisted in his pleas on the ground that those who had killed that mighty elephant were not ordinary wrestlers. It was just and proper that they should have a wrestling match with

Krishna and Balarama.

Thereafter Krishna with Chanura and Balarama with Mushtika were locked into a battle hand-to-hand, leg-to-leg and neck-to-neck. All the skills in wrestling were displayed by the combatants. But the audience was not enjoying this display. They strongly felt that this fight was between the strong and the weak. The ladies assembled there were also becoming apprehensive. They felt that these fights were between tender lotus petals and a spade.

However, when Krishna gave fist blows on the back of Chanura and the great wrestler staggered on the ground, it was then the turn of the audience to get a big jolt. Balarama also did likewise to Mushtika. Both the wrestlers then began trembling. Both of them showed signs of exhaustion and with a few more blows they fell down dead, like big trees falling down in a hurricane. When these two principal wrestlers fell down the other lesser ones like Kuta, Tosala etc. challenged them. They were also killed and the rest fled from the arena to save their lives.

Kamsa slain : All the people gathered there, began to clap in ecstasy. Their joy knew no bounds. The drums also beat in acknowledgement of the victory of Krishna and Balarama. This was not liked by Kamsa who immediately shouted to stop that drumbeating and revelry. He was so beside himself with anger that he ordered his officers and guards to drive the two sons of Vasudeo out of Mathura and kill Nanda and Vasudeo for their cunning and deceit. He also ordered them to kill his father Ugrasena who had sided with his enemies.

At these orders, Krishna became infuriated with Kamsa and within a second jumped over his guards and caught hold of him with great force. As Kamsa was himself determined to kill Krishna, he was not off his guard. He drew his sword and brought it down on Krishna, with such a great force that it missed the target and dug itself into the ground. Krishna then knocked his crown and dragged him from his seat to the wrestling dias and threw him down. Krishna at once straddled his chest and began striking him with blows till Kamsa lost his life.

There was great jubilation over the death of that tyrant. However cries in lamentation arose from his wives and close accomplices. Kamsa's eight younger brothers headed by Kanka rushed at Krishna with a view to kill him. But Balarama took control of the situation and killed all the eight brothers.

When all the sons were thus killed, Kamsa's mother and father were plunged in sorrow. At their cries Krishna also became dejected at what had happened. However, they all took courage, and ordered state

funeral and the last rites of the dead according to the tradition. Krishna told them all : "The enmity is over once the enemy is dead. Moreover Kamsa was my maternal uncle and his body should be shown all honours due to his position."

Once Kamsa was out of the way, Krishna rejected the offer of his grand father the King Ugrasena to accept the crown of Mathura. He pressed Ugrasena to ascend the throne again and rule the kingdom in the best interests of his subjects.

The joy of their parents Vasudeo and Devaki was indescribable but its expression was subdued. They felt guilty of their parental performance. Keeping them away at Gokul and Vrindavana, they felt, was their unpardonable guilt. Krishna and Balarama at once recognised their pitiable plight and rushed to them and joined them in close embrace. They then joined their foster parents Nanda and Yashoda and mixed with their cowherd boys. There was jubilation all around.

After the funeral rites for the dead were over, Vasudeo arranged for the thread ceremony of his two sons, though they were now quite grown up boys. They were then duly initiated into the sacred ceremony and instructed to chant the Gayatri Mantra. They were also instructed to follow the regulative principles of student life by their family priest Gargacharya.

At Sandipani's School : It was now time for them to part company with their real as well as foster parents and cowherd friends and go to the hermitage of Sandipani, the teacher, then known for his mastery over the Vedic lore. His Ashrama was situated in Ujjain on the banks of the river Kshipra.

Sandipani instructed them in all the intricacies of Vedic wisdom including the *Upanishads*. As they were *Kshatriyas*, they were specially instructed in the military science, politics, administration and mathematics.

They were by now of 14-15 years old and by their prowess and skill in killing Kamsa and his associates, they had sufficiently exhibited their mastery in military science and politics. However, Sandipani made them acquainted with the theoretical basis of these. They had phenomenal grasping power and capacity to retain in memory whatever they had learnt. They would take their lessons during the day, and by nightfall they showed mastery over all what they had learnt.

They also learnt the science of singing and dancing and how to compose songs and how to recognize the different tunes. They were also given instructions in the art of painting and decorating a place with different flower designs. They had lessons in the art of making jewellery and had learnt how to perform on the theatrical stage.

They learnt practical psychology. They had also lessons in the different languages of different regions. They acquired all the spiritual lore of the Vedas. In short they became the reservoir of all knowledge pertaining to all arts and sciences.

When the time for departure from Sandipani Ashrama came Krishna wanted to pay his teacher Guru Daxina (honorarium to the teacher). The teacher gauged that here was a disciple who was capable of bringing back their son. The boy while quite young was drowned in the sea near Prabhasa in south Saurashtra (Gujarat state, India). The teacher begged Krishna to favour him with the return of the boy. That would be his fee.

Krishna and Balarama then proceeded straight to Prabhasa and searched for the boy. They were told that a demon Panchajanya had devoured the boy. They found that *Panchajanya* lived in a conchshell. They took the shell out but the boy was not in the belly of the shell. Krishna however took that shell and called it Panchajanya and used it as his personal conch.

Krishna, it is said, obtained the boy back from the abode of the God of death and to the unimaginably profound joy of his teacher and his wife handed him over to them. The teacher completely satisfied with the performance of his pupils gave Krishna the benediction that whatever he would utter would remain as eternally fresh as the Vedas. It is because of this benediction, Krishna's teachings recorded in his Gita – (Lord's song) are as fresh as ever.

Jarasandha's March : Kamsa's two widows Asti and Prapti were the daughters of Jarasandha the mightiest ruler of Magadh (Modern Bihar). He had a large army and he decided to kill Krishna to avenge the death of his son-in-law *Kamsa*. He vowed that he would rid the world of all the members of Yadu dynasty to which Krishna belonged.

He marched against Mathura with thirteen military phalanxes consisting of many thousand chariots, horses, elephants and infantry soldiers. Krishna and Balarama also gathered as many soldiers as possible. The difference between Jarasandha's forces and those of Krishna was that the former were mercenary, while the latter were fighting for a just cause, namely to defend their motherland. Moreover when the boys Krishna and Balarama came out and faced Jarasandha, the latter felt at first a little compassion for them as they were in fact related to him as grandsons. Again Jarasandha felt a little ashamed to fight with these boys for they were not brought up as Kshatriyas but as Vaishyas.

Krishna's army though small was well equipped and well trained. With the inspiring leadership of Krishna its morale was also high. A very skilled archer as he was, Krishna immediately decided to demobilise

Jarasandha's army by killing his elephants first. This decision proved to be correct and Krishna killed many of Jarasandha's elephants and reduced their menace. The incessant arrows thrown by Krishna appeared as a whirl wind of blazing fire and incapacitated many of the cavalry and foot soldiers. Balarama on his part continued his pressure on the charioteers. He used his club with devastating effect. The cowards on Jarasandha's side left the battle-field. Balarama ultimately secured the person of Jarasandha himself and tied him down with ropes. But Krishna showed magnanimity of his heart and allowed him to escape unscathed.

Jarasandha then repeated his attacks on Mathura. These two brothers organised the city's defence each time and repulsed his attacks.

Though the citizens of Mathura heaved a sigh of relief each time at the successful conclusion of the war, yet the wars were very bloody and the wise amongst them felt that if Jarasandha repeats the attacks further a grave misfortune would befall them. One Vikadru elderly statesman praised Krishna and Balarama for unparalleled valour, yet he advised them to leave the city, as their presence alone would induce Jarasandha to attack Mathura. This town was then, as now is on the plains and it has no natural defences. Because Mathura's republicanism, the citizens had not to face many enemies before. Vikadru, therefore, proposed that these two brothers should leave the town for some fortified place across the Vindhya. The two brothers instantaneously agreed, for their main purpose was to punish the evildoers and protect the righteous. They were always for peace and wanted to avoid the war. Krishna in particular observed : "I have well understood your proposal. You have well pointed out the main cause of this bloody conflict and the might of the adversary. You have also stated what is just and proper. The rules of the game of war require the minimum loss of bloodshed. Your valuable advice is also based on long term view -

ब्रुवतां वः श्रुतं वाक्यं हेतुतः क्रमतः तथा ।

न्यायतः शास्त्रतः चैव देवं चैवानुपश्यतम् ॥

*bruvatām vaḥśrutam vākyam hetutaḥ kramataḥ tathā,
nyāyataḥ śāstrataḥ ca eva daivam ca eva anupaśyatham"*

(Harivamsa 39-5)

Krishna wanted Jarasandha to dissipate his energies in pursuing him and fighting with him in places far removed from his bases of supply and other considerations pertaining to logistics. Even though full of unlimited strength, the two brothers left for Karavirpura in south of the Vindhya, the region called Dakshinapatha (in the present Maharashtra state of India). Jarasandha would come thither in pursuit of them, they guessed.

On the way, they met Parashurama the descendent of an earlier

incarnation of Vishnu, previous to Rama, the son of Dasharatha of Ayodhya. He advised them not to stay there, for the king of that place was of unstable temperament and easily roused to anger. He therefore travelled south-wards along with them and decided to stay on the Gomanta mountain (modern Goa). There Parashurama gave them different weapons, Chakra to Krishna and Hala (ploughshare) to Balarama. He told them that Jarasandha would come over there in pursuit of them both and that they would be able to defeat him. The King there also would be helpful to them. (Here Parashuram would not be the son of the sage Jamadagnya. He obviously was one who hailed from that family.)

As excepted by them, Jarasandha rushed to the mountain Gomanta with a huge army consisting of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry. He ordered his colleagues (other subordinate Kings), and commanders to encircle the mountain, closing all possible escape routes. Further he was advised not to scale the mountain through some routes, for they would be difficult to cross and climb up as his army units were not suitable for mountain warfare. The army, therefore, followed the scorched earth policy so that these two brothers along with their associates would be burnt to death.

Krishna and Balarama saw through the strategy of the opponents and released the stored up waters of the lakes in the mountains and quenched the fires. With the waters running down the mountains, the army commanders of Jarasandha became nonplussed. They could not go up, nor could they move about, as the whole of their camp was knee-deep in the mud caused by the rushing waters.

Krishna and Balarama with their newly obtained weapons then fell on the army of Jarasandha. The army had become disorganised. With their associates these two brothers made a mincemeat of the motley crowd gathered round Jarasandha. Some of the Kings and a few commanders, particularly Damaghosha of Chedi, then made peace with these two heroes. Jarasandha and others had to run away humiliated.

Damaghosha was married to Krishna's aunt. Pandavas' mother Kunti was also his another aunt. Damaghosha advised Krishna to proceed to Karavirapura, as the guest of Shrigala, the king who was also a Yadava. But short-tempered as he was, he attacked Krishna's army thinking it to be his neemy. In the battle that ensued, the King was killed. The mistake of the King was realised by the Queen who approached Krishna with her son. Krishna magnanimously agreed to the request of the Queen to crown her son. After the last rites for the dead king were performed and his son was installed on the throne, Krishna and Balarama returned along with the King Damaghasha to Mathura where they received a very hearty welcome from their grandfather

the King Ugrasena, other nobles and the citizens.

Both the brothers passed some of their happiest days in the company of their parents, Vasudeo, Devaki and Rohini.

Rukmini Swayamvaram : At that time in Kaundinyapur the capital of the Kingdom of Vidarbha, Swayamvara – choosing the bridegroom ceremony – was being held for Rukmini the daughter of Bhishmaka the King. Renowned for her beauty and accomplishments, Rukmini's hand was being sought by almost all the Kings of the then India. Krishna was also instigated by his Yadava friends to attend and try his luck. But Jarasandha and others who had attended it, objected to his presence on the ground that he was neither a king nor a prince with a claim to the crown. Hearing this low talk about such a renowned personality as Krishna, the Kings Kriha and Kaushika of Vidarbha offered to crown him as the King of their country. Even Lord Indra, the King of the heavens, participated in that ceremony. In view of this Bhishmaka the King and the host felt ashamed that he did not give a fitting welcome to this scion of the Yadu family and after due apologies to Krishna cancelled the ceremony itself.

Kalayavan killed by strategem : At such an unexpected turn of events, Rukmi the son of Bhishmaka, along with Jarasandha decided to destroy Mathura. For this purpose they sought the help of Kalayavana, the powerful Yavana king from south of Mathura with his seat in the Aravali Hills. Krishna saw that his presence in Mathura was attracting such a formidable combination of Kings to invade Mathura. Moreover because of his growing popularity and uncommon strength, Kings and others who were being put in trouble, used to approach him for help. The Yadavas from far and near had concentrated themselves in Mathura. The land of Mathura was not sufficient for them. He therefore put before them the proposal to vacate Mathura and proceed to occupy the newly built expansive city of Dwaraka on the west coast. Though the proposal was heart-rending for many of the old as well as the young residents of Mathura, they accepted the proposal of Krishna, as they became convinced that otherwise they would all be destroyed in the battles between Jarasandha alongwith his allies and Krishna. As soon as the decision was taken, bulk of the population left Mathura for Dwaraka.

It is stated in Bhagavata Purana that Jarasandha had attacked Mathura seventeen times; each time, he had to return after heavy losses in men and materials. Harivamsha is silent on the point.

Kalayavana was the son of Garga muni the priest of the Yadavas. Once Garga was humiliated by them. He had therefore vowed to destroy Mathura, the Yadava seat; so through Lord Shiva's boon, begot Kalayavana of a young and beautiful cowherd woman. She was the wife of a Yavana King.

Because Krishna and Balarama left the battlefield of Mathura secretly, Krishna earned the title Ranachoda – one who abandons the battle field without a fight, like a coward.

Krishna was so bold that he walked through the lines of Kalayavana's army unarmed. It being the custom then not to attack an unarmed person even if he is your sworn enemy, no soldier touched him. He was walking as if he was walking like a god amongst mortals. When Kalayavana noticed him, he challenged Krishna for a duel. But instead of responding to his call, Krishna began running fast from thither. Kalayavana also began pursuing him.

Thus Krishna's purpose was served. Jarāsandha and Kalayavana lifted the siege of Mathura, for their purpose was to kill Krishna and the Yadavas in a battle. The Yadavas had already left to a safe place in faroff Dwaraka. And Krishna eluding the grasp of Kalayavana was running as fast as he could. Howsoever fast he could run, Kalayavana was unable to overpower Krishna. After some days of running Kalayavana saw him entering a cave. He also entered it in pursuit of Krishna. But he lost the track in the darkness of the cave. He saw a man sleeping there. He felt Krishna must have been tired and so was fast sleeping. Kalayavana gave the sleeping man such a kick as to rouse him from the sleep. He was sleeping there for a long time and so when he got up and began to look around, he noticed Kalayavana a huge man of strong build. The sleeping man was the scion of the Ikshvaku dynasty in which Lord Rama was born. He was Muchakunda – the son of a great King of that family, named Mandhata. In his intensely angry mood rays of fire emanated from his eye and Kalayavana was burnt to ashes in an instant.

Muchakunda, after his incessant fights with demons and driving them off and making earth a safe haven for the righteous, was taking rest in the cave. He was given the boon by Lord Indra that whoever would awake him from his sleep would be instantly reduced to ashes. He was thus sleeping there for a very very long period. Krishna saw to it that Kalayavana would rouse him from sleep and would get burnt in the process.

Then Krishna appeared before Muchakunda. Muchakunda was bewitched by the magnificent personality of Krishna. To him Krishna appeared to be the very God Vishnu. He came out of the cave followed by Krishna. When he saw the world around vastly different from what he had left before going to sleep, he felt that he was an odd man out. He thanked Krishna profusely and left for the Himalayas. He practised penance and left for his heavenly abode.

By a well-laid out strategy Krishna got rid of his fell enemy and got control over his enemy's vast army and wealth. He then visited Mathura and seeing that the city was safe from the marauders, left

it for good, and decided to settle in Dwaraka.

New city founded : This city of Dwaraka was laid out by Krishna according to very well excuted plan. It had regular planned roads, streets and lanes. At intervals gardens with lotus and other variagated coloured flower trees were also laid out. The city had many palaces and mansions. It had high and exquisitely carved out gates. This city was so big that some land from the sea was also reclaimed. It appeared as if the city was built in the midst of the sea. It looked very opulent and none of its citizens had to suffer the pangs of poverty. In its central place was the assembly hall named Sudharma which was the pride of such a city equal in character and expanse to the city of the gods, Alakapuri.

When the Yadavas settled in this newly constructed city, Balarama was married to Revati the daughter of King Revata.

Several times defeated and humiliated Jarasandha now planned to marry Shishupal the King of Chedi and Krishna's cousin brother, with Rukmini, the daughter of Bhishmaka, the King of Vidarbha. We have already noted that Jarasandha's earlier plan to accomplish this feat against the wishes of Bhishmaka were foiled by Krishna's presence at the marriage hall.

Marriage with Rukmini : This time taking advantage of Krishna's departure from Mathura to Dwaraka, Jarasandha circulated the myth that Krishna had to run away from the battlefield of Mathura because of his superior strength.

But Rukmini had already made up her mind to marry Krishna having heard of his wonderful exploits, strength of character and exquisite personality. She was also made up of the same stuff as Krishna. She therefore had no wish to marry Shishupala.

Bhishmaka her father had however to yield to the threats of his son Rukmi and emperor Jarasandha. This time they had collected around them the Kings of South and North India, in case some scuffle would arise with Krishna.

The Yadavas under the lead of Balarama registered their presence at the capital of Bhishmaka, in sufficient strength. Krishna and Balarama were also welcomed at the capital by the King Bhishmaka. They were lodged in a palace on the outskirts of the capital Kundinapur. It appears that Rukmini and Krishna through secret correspondence had already decided on a strategy through which Krishna would kidnap her, leaving the fighting part of it to Balarama. Her father, she knew would not object to this step being taken by her.

On the morning of the day before that was fixed for her marriage,

she came to worship the Goddess Durga, whose temple was on the outskirts of the city of Kundinapur. Just as she was coming out of the temple after worship, Krishna appeared on the scene, caught hold of her and put her on his chariot and started off to Dwaraka.

There are eight kinds of marriages according to the Vedic tradition. The best is Brāhma – according to which the parents of the Bride and Bridegroom arrange it and fix the date. In the royal style, the bridegroom goes to the house of the bride and on the appointed date and time and in the presence of the Brahmanas, the priests, relatives and friends, the bride is given away along with other gifts. Krishna's marriage to Rukmini was of the Rakshasa type as he had kidnapped Rukmini, though according to her desire. His brother had to fight for her with Jarasandha and his allies.

The opponents also began chasing Krishna who had gone a little distance by the time they could perceive what was happening before their very eyes. Krishna appeared like a lion lifting his prize from amongst the assembly of jackals. As soon as Rukmi the brother of Rukmini and the sworn opponent of Krishna heard of the episode, he rushed to the battle-field and challenged Krishna to a fight, and to take Rukmini as his prize if he would win the battle. Great fight ensued between these two great soldiers. Krishna because of his superior skill, was able to capture him and was about to drive his sword through his heart when Rukmini fell at his feet and entreated him to give her the gift of life of her brother Rukmi. Krishna could not resist the feelingly pleaded soft tones of Rukmini, and so to give him some light punishment he tied him with some piece of cloth.

When Balarama, after defeating the armies of Jarasandha and his allies, appeared on the scene, he pacified Rukmini by untying her brother and releasing him. Rukmi on his part did not return to Kundinpur as he could not defeat Krishna and bring back Rukmini. He established another city for himself, named Bhojakata and stayed there for the rest of his life.

After the return of Krishna with Rukmini to Dwaraka, the marriage was celebrated with pomp and splendour. The whole city of Dwaraka was decorated with flags, festoons and flowers. On the sides of the gates of each and every house, water jugs filled with water were kept. During the night there was illumination by thousands of lamps, decorating each and every building. The entire city was jubilant over Lord Krishna's wedding with Rukmini. Their Gopal, their Krishna had now become Lord Krishna in their eyes.

There were demands on him from different parts of India to rid the afflicted persons of their distresses. He was now considered as a living god on earth, capable of accomplishing such feats as were

otherwise considered impossible of achievement. We have already discussed such an episode, namely killing of Narakasura, the King of North-Eastern India.

Thereafter he got a little respite and then gave undivided attention for the developments of one or the other arts and crafts or sciences. The development of the plant of a very sweet smelling parijataka flower is his gift to India. There are many episodes in Harivamsha concerning the acquisition of many more such sweet-smelling flower-plants. Mention may be made here of the fight between Andhakasura and God Shiva for the Sentana flowers and laying of the garden of Mandara trees.

To such a Lord and his consort Rukmini, the very incarnation of Goddess Laxmi, handsome son Pradyumna in the very likeness of Krishna was born. He was later married to Shubhangi, the daughter of Rukmi, the brother of Rukmini. The estranged brother was thus pacified. To Pradyumna and Shubhangi, was born Aniruddha.

Krishna charged with theft of a jewel : Lord Krishna though a very accomplished and a scrupulously clean man of impeccable character, had to face many scandals during his long life of 125 years. He could maintain his cool even in the most provocative situations.

One such scandal regarding the alleged theft by Krishna of the famous jewel Syamantaka is narrated here.

A nobleman named Satrajita had, through long worship of the Sun, had acquired a very dazzling jewel called Syamantaka. He came to meet Krishna with this newly acquired treasure trove which enhanced his bodily effulgence. The jewel itself, it is stated, had the capacity to produce about 170 pounds of gold every day.

When Satrajita met Krishna to show his opulence in the form of this valuable jewel, Krishna advised him to present it to the king Ugrasena as he was the overlord of all the territory and the rightful owner of all the valuables in it. An individual should not be possessor of such valuable piece of wealth, was his argument.

Satrajita did not listen to this sane advice. He and his family members continued to display their uncommon inheritance. Prasena his brother one day wore it around his neck and rode on horse back into the forest. Dazzled by the brilliant rays emanating from it, a big lion was attracted towards him. It killed Prasena and his horse and ran away to the cave with that precious jewel. Jambavana another noble (stated to be a bear) of that place heard about this news. He attacked the lion with force and killed and took away the jewel. He was a devotee of Lord Ramachandra and did not attach much importance to wealth. His son took it away from him.

In the mean while, when Satrajita found that his brother had not returned from the forest, he suspected Krishna of some foul play. He felt that Krishna must have taken the jewel by killing his brother Prasena. He circulated this type of rumour which soon became the common talk of the town. Krishna assured every citizen of his clean conduct and organised a search party to find out Prasena. They soon found the body of Prasana and also traced the footsteps of the lion to the cave. Then they found that the lion was also killed. Krishna immediately guessed that this must be the exploit of that sturdy Jambavana who held Krishna in deep respect. But when Krishna appeared before him with the search party, he felt that he must be some thief who had come to steal away the jewel. In the fight that ensued Jambavana was overpowered by Krishna. But out of compassion, Krishna spared his life. Jambavana immediately came to know as to who he was. He realised his mistake and on knowing that Krishna had come there for the jewel in order to free himself from defamation, Jambavana not only offered the jewel, but also his beautiful daughter Jambavati in marriage to Krishna. Because of these developments Krishna was away from Dwaraka for quite a long time. When his parents and the citizens found him appearing unhurt, they became very joyful. King Ugrasena convened a meeting of the chiefs and the nobles and in that assembly Krishna explained the whole episode. Satrajita, who was present, became ashamed of his false charge against Krishna who on his part handed to him the jewel. This added to the mortification of Satrajita. He sincerely wanted to atone for the grievous wrong he had done to Krishna. He brooded over the problem for long. Ultimately he got the ray of light and requested Krishna to take the hand of his daughter Satyabhama in marriage, along with that jewel. Krishna graciously agreed to the proposal but returned the jewel to Satrajita who was very eager to possess it.

Shatadhanva another nobleman wanted Satyabhama to be his wife. She was exquisitely beautiful and accomplished. When Satrajita refused Shatadhanva's request for the hand of Satyabhama, he one night treacherously entered his house and killed him and took away the jewel. At this time Krishna and Balarama were away at Hastinapura on learning of the supposed death of their aunt Kunti and her five sons the Pandavas.

Satyabhama was terribly upset at this ghastly murder of her father. She kept his dead body in an oil tank and rushed to Hastinapura to acquaint her beloved Krishna of the gruesome murder of her father. Krishna and Balarama hearing this terrible news at once returned to Dwaraka.

It was now Shatadhanva's turn to be terribly upset at the return of Krishna and his brother Balarama post-haste to Dwaraka with a

determination to avenge his treacherous act. Shatadhanva, finding none to help him in his predicament, and at wit's end to know what to do, flew away from Dwaraka.

Krishna and Balarama on learning of the flight of Shatadhanva, mounted on their chariots and set up in hot pursuit of him. They traced him at Mithila and Krishna killed him with his disc. They did not find the jewel on searching his body.

Balarama stayed at Mithila for some time and Krishna returned to Dwaraka to trace the jewel. Akrura the uncle of Krishna, was found to be performing lot of sacrifices and distributing large quantity of gold as Daxina to Brahminas. This led Krishna to believe that the jewel must have been with him. Otherwise, the means of Akrura were limited and would not permit him to live extravagantly. Krishna therefore spoke sweetly, but directly charged him with the possession of the jewel. He also boldly threatened him that if he would not part with it, his son from Satyabhama the legal claimant of the jewel, would take it away forcibly. Akrura finding that he could not resist the claims of Krishna, brought it out and showed it to every body. He then allowed it to be kept by Akrura with the full knowledge of the citizens of Dwaraka. This jewel was then kept in the temple, as the common property of all.

Krishna's Avatahood : Krishna's main mission in his life, as we have seen in the beginning, was to establish the rule of the righteous. He assures the down-trodden of the whole world thus :

“यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानम् अधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥

“Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata, |

abhyuthānam adharmasya tadā ātmānam sṛjāmi aham ||

Paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām, |

dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge || B.G.IV-7, 8

– Whenever and wherever righteousness is pushed down in the scale, and there is predominance of the unrighteous, at that time I descend myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to re-establish the principles of righteous conduct, I myself appear time after time.”

In his time, he had found that the Emperor Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana were bent upon denying the right of Yudhishtira the eldest of the Pandavas to rule over the Empire. They had, therefore, tried to burn the five Pandavas with their mother Kunti in the house

of shellac. But due to the foresight and vigilance of Vidura the cousin and the Prime Minister of Dhritarashtra they escaped unhurt. In the guise of the Brahmin-youths they had attended the "choosing of the bridegroom-ceremony- *swayamvara* of Draupadi, the daughter of king Drupada, of the Panchalas. Arjuna, one of the Pandavas was successful in aiming at the target, the eye of the moving fish hung overhead in a jar. He then disclosed his identity. For this ceremony Duryodhana, Jarasandha and others had specially come. But they were not successful. Krishna and Balarama had also come with their army.

Krishna had found that the Pandavas were always keen in observing the principles of righteous conduct. Naturally, he had decided to throw his weight on their side. When he met the Pandavas at Drupada's palace after the marriage ceremony was over, they were assured of help from Drupada. Krishna offered his respects to Kunti, his aunt. She feelingly told him that he was always partial to them, though not indifferent to others.

Krishna is regarded as Godhead only because of his observance of scrupulous impartiality towards all. His grace falls on those who surrender to him with clean hearts and strive for righteous gains. Through certain circumstances, Krishna had to marry eight very chaste and beautiful princesses. These marriages brought him great wealth in men and materials. He led a very happy, contented and ideal family life. It is stated in Bhagavata Purana, that he used to rise up very early in the morning i.e. at about 3.30 a.m., the Brahma Muhurta the best time to rise up and start daily routine. He had indefatigable energy both physical and mental. He is called Yogeshvara the Lord having complete control over mind and the bodily senses. When therefore the poets described of his physical contact with so many of his wives (sixteen thousand and odd) this would have to be described as contact with his plenary expansions and not with himself. When he is elevated to the position of the personality of Godhead, he is said to assume many forms and satisfy his many wives with his physical presence at each of their palaces at one and the same time. Those not thoroughly acquainted with the Indian conception of God as Pure Energy and Bliss and the consequential formulation *Aham Brahma Asmi*- 'I am God, the soul in each and every living being is God,' will not be able to comprehend Krishna's presence at every house of his several wives. It is all symbolic. One who realizes this can legitimately say that he is God and every thing around is God and nothing else. It is because of this, the Hindu the follower of the Vedic Sanatana Dharma considers the whole earth with her animate beings as members of one and the same family - '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*'. Krishna's existence is not relative existence as yours and mine. He is Himself existence. Everything but Himself is relative. He is the supreme Truth, the Saguna (personal) and Nirguna

(impersonal) combined into one. He is the Supreme (and only one) Reality. Every thing else exists in Him and so is relatively real and not Absolutely Real as Krishna is. He is independent of every other thing and is selfsufficient. He does not need anybody's help. It is not so with others. They are dependent on Him.

To such a personality moving in flesh and blood about 5000 years ago, a message came from the hundreds of kings and noblemen who were imprisoned by Jarasandha, the powerful Emperor ruling from Magadha. The message implored Krishna to deliver them from the clutches of Jarasandha. At this time at Indraprastha, the king Yudhishtira was planning Rajasuya sacrifice—proclaiming his overlordship over all the kings of Bharatavarsha—the then India. He had also sent invitation to Krishna to attend the ceremony. Now the question before Krishna was, what was his priority under the circumstances.

We have seen that the Pandavas were staying with Drupada, after the marriage ceremony. They had now the backing of both Drupada and Krishna. They were also deliberating what should be their next step.

III

DHARMARAJA CROWNED

At Hastinapura, when the news broke out that the Pandavas were hale and hearty and in addition had won the hand of the princess Draupadi through a hard-earned contest, Dhritarashtra became crestfallen, though outwardly to please his subjects, Bhishma his great uncle and Vidura his cousin, was feigning a forced smile on his face at this news. Duryodhana and Shakuni (maternal uncle of Duryodhana) were pressing Dhritarashtra to take action to prevent the Pandavas' return to Hastinapura. They were suggesting direct military action. But Dhritarashtra knew full well that the militarily the Pandavas had an upper hand. He therefore, consulted Bhishma, Drona (the teacher) and Vidura to find out the way out of the impasse. Bhishma ruled out military action, as he was convinced of the righteousness of the Pandavas' cause. He, therefore, suggested partition of the kingdom. Drona the great teacher, and Vidura the Prime Minister, supported Bhishma's proposal. Shakuni, Duryodhana and Karna fumed and fretted, but against the strongest combination of Bhishma, Drona and Vidura, Dhritarashtra had no other go but to agree to the proposal. Moreover, this was the only way to remove the stigma attaching to Dhritarashtra that he had planned to remove the Pandavas blocking the way of Duryodhana to the Kingship, by burning them in the waxhouse. The citizens of the state were openly talking about it in the street corners. They also accepted Bhishma's proposal.

The problem then arose, as to how to convince the Pandavas, their mother Kunti and the Panchala king Drupada, about the bonafides of Dhritarashtra the villain of the piece. Vidura accepted the responsibility.

Kunti had complete faith in Vidura for she knew he was instrumental in conveying to Yudhishtira the plans of Duryodhana and Shakuni to burn the Pandavas' in the house of wax. She accepted the invitation of Dhritarashtra to visit Hastinapura and accept half of the Kingdom for her sons.

They were well received at Hastinapura and as had been earlier decided, Yudhishtira was crowned as King at Indraprastha the modern Delhi. The place was very dangerous and was the den of thieves and wild animals. Krishna was present at the crowning ceremony. After it was over, Krishna and Arjuna decided to set fire to the forest around. It was called Khandava.

After the whole region was cleared of the thorns and prickles and the uneven ground was made plain, the Pandavas established there a very beautiful city. After more than twelve years' hard labour, it looked like the capital of Indra, the Lord of the heavens. It had all the material opulences and benefits. It was a very well-laid-out city with gardens and running fountains. It was then called Indraprastha the land of Indra. The whole Kingdom with hard and well-directed labour, became a land flowing with milk and honey. The citizens then urged Yudhishtira to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice proclaiming to all other kings of different regions that he was their overlord, the Emperor. Yudhishtira was convinced that Krishna alone was the proper person whose advice can be sought in the matter. He would not give advice to please him (Yudhishtira). Neither was Krishna partial nor blind to the situation. Rajasuya is performed by one who can secure the respect and allegiance of all kings.

Krishna, who had returned to Dwarka after the plan to construct the city of Indraprastha was finalised, now got the invitation from Yudhishtira seeking his advice as to the proposal of his citizens and his ministers. Krishna, therefore, requested his elders and ministers to guide him in the matter. They all started deliberations in their great hall—the *Sudharma*—assembly house of Dwarka. The consensus in the Assembly was first to subdue Jarasandha and release all his captives.

Udhava one of the elders in the assembly was called upon to give his opinion in the matter. He was in favour of accepting the invitation of the King Yudhishtira. For he argued, unless Jarasandha is subdued, Yudhishtira could not possibly perform such a sacrifice. So by accepting the invitation of the king of Indraprastha, Krishna would also have to kill Jarasandha and other opponents. This would enable him to release all the prisoners of that demonic king.

This advice was appreciated by all those present. Then the preparations were made for the departure of Krishna along with his queens and children. He had also taken with him, his commander-in-chief Satyaki with large number of chariots, along with elephants, cavalry, infantry and similar royal paraphernalia. Krishna was not actually the king. But he was treated as such.

When Yudhishtira heard that Krishna had arrived with his consorts and the royal army, he proceeded to receive him along with his brothers and queen Draupadi and other high-placed women of the royal household. After the reception, Yudhishtira saw to it that Krishna, his queens, his soldiers, his ministers, and his secretaries were all comfortably accommodated.

Jarasandha slain : Yudhishtira then summoned his assembly of illustrious citizens. In it he addressed Lord Krishna thus: "My people urge me to perform Rajasuya, the King of all sacrifices. But as you see Jarasandha would not accept my suzerainty. This means war. Then why should we perform such a sacrifice? Why should I not be satisfied with my Kingdom and avoid blood-shed? I do not want to be emperor."

Bhima very much resented this attitude of his elder brother. He said that ambition is the noblest virtue of a king. Your pusillanimous contentment would make you a butt of ridicule amongst the assembly of Kshatriyas. What can we not achieve by my physical strength, Krishna's cool and unfailing calculations and Arjuna's dexterity as an archer? Leave it to us three this matter of killing Jarasandha."

Krishna whole-heartedly supported this suggestion. But Yudhishtira intervened by stating that Jarasandha would kill his two brothers who were his two eyes.

Arjuna asserted that they had sufficient strength and wisdom to slay Jarasandha. Krishna was delighted to hear these words of his dear friend Arjuna. He said that all men were bound to die. But the noblest duty of a Kshatriya was to suppress the wicked and win the glory.

Yudhishtira had to agree. Thus Krishna's purpose of attacking Jarasandha on the invitation of the captive kings was served by others taking decisions palatable to him.

Jarasandha was the son of Brihadratha the great hero of Magadha. He was a noble king. He had married the two daughters of the king of Kasi. He had vowed to treat them equally without showing partiality to either.

He was, however, childless. Through austerities and the compassion shown by the sage Kaushika, his two wives became pregnant. The sage had given the king a mango fruit which was cut into equal halves

and given each piece to each wife. Strangely enough each wife gave birth to but a half of a child. They all were plunged into great sorrow and directed their attendants to put the two pieces into a cloth and throw them on a heap of refuse in the street.

Accidentally a demoness chanced to see these two pieces of flesh and held them together. They at once adhered to each other and a very handsome male child was the result. The demoness took pity on the child and handed it over to the king. Her name was Jara. She joined the two pieces together and so the child was named Jarasandha after her (joined together by Jara).

Once the decision to kill Jarasandha was taken, Shri Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna decided upon a plan. Shri Krishna said "It is no use spilling blood in fights with armies. He must be prevailed upon to a single combat and slain."

In those days a Kshatriya had to accept the challenge to a duel. Moreover, Jarasandha is stated to have the strength of several elephants. Krishna's strategam, therefore, worked.

This trinity clad in the robes of sannyasins entered Magadha capital and straight went to the palace of Jarasandha. At heart Jarasandha had respect for the holy men. When he saw them, he received them with respect. But when he observed them closely, he found the scars of the use of a bow string on their hands. Further, their proud bearing made him suspect that they were Kshatriyas disguised as tapasvis (men practising penance). Krishna also did not want to mince words. He straightaway disclosed their identities and challenged him to choose one of them for a combat. Krishna, through his spies, had learnt his weak point. He had remained vulnerable at his joints.

When challenged, Jarasandha addressed Krishna as a cowherd boy with whom he cannot engage himself in a combat as a Kshatriya. He also dismissed his fight with Arjuna calling him as a mere boy. He chose Bhima for the combat. He also chivalrously agreed to fight with him without weapons as Bhima was unarmed.

These two had giant's strength. They fought together for thirteen days with no result. On the fourteenth day Jarasandha who was quite senior in age to Bhima, began showing signs of fatigue and exhaustion. Krishna felt that opportune time had come to make an end of him. He indicated this to Bhima who immediately lifted Jarasandha and seizing his legs tore his body asunder into two halves. Bhima roared in exultation. But to his surprise the two sundered halves again were joined together and Jarasandha leapt up into vigorous life and attacked Bhima again.

Bhima was dismayed and was at a loss to know what he should do to bring about an end of his foe. Krishna again indicated to Bhima

by his fingers to throw the two parts cross-wise, so that the two halves could not come together and adhere to each other. This he did and there was an end of Jarasandha.

Krishna pacified the Magadhans by appointing Sahadeo the eldest son of Jarasandha to the vacant throne. Krishna's mission was not to create pockets of power for him but to see that the righteous win and the wicked are destroyed. His next act was the release of the royal prisoners kept in captivity by Jarasandha. There was all-round jubilation over the death of the tyrant, Jarasandha by name.

The fights for supremacy at the cost of countless innocent lives of the ordinary peace-loving citizens is the disease of political power. Instead, Krishna wanted the mighty to fight in the cause of the ailing community.

Yudhishtira performs Rajasuya : When Jarasandha was removed from the scene, the way was now clear for Yudhishtira to perform Rajasuya and assume the title of Emperor. The Pandavas performed the sacrifice with great pomp and splendour and Dharmaraja (Yudhishtira) was recognised as the Emperor by the assembled kings and nobles.

India, then as now, is a land of a number of states. Their independence was scrupulously respected. Though culture and Dharma (body of rules of righteous conduct) was common throughout the land, autonomy of each state was ensured through the institution of Emperor. He saw to it that the different states were allowed to have their own way in matters internal. The inter-state disputes were also allowed to be settled by negotiations between them. The political rivalries were often settled through the use of arms, the Emperor intervening when approached by one of the parties. He often used his influence on the side of justice and fair play.

When the time came for departure of the honourable guests assembled at the ceremony after its completion, the question arose as to who should be honoured by the Emperor first. Bhisma and Drona the elder statemen of the Kurus, (Pandavas came from this family) unanimously voted in favour of Krishna. This was also the opinion of Dharmaraja the Emperor. Many assembled heads of the respective states including the son of Jarasandha reverentially but velemently argued in favour of the honour of Agrapuja – first worshipful honour, being bestowed on Lord Krishna. Everybody assembled there felt that Krishna was the most exalted personality in that assembly.

But there was one Shishupala the king of Chedi and the son of Krishna's one of the aunts, who had become his sworn enemy for Krishna's act of kidnapping Rukmini. He was the King who was promised the hand of Rukmini by her father, though reluctantly through the

pressure of her brother Rukmi. He was also the close ally of Jarasandha. He stood up suddenly and strongly protested against the proposal. He described Krishna as a cowherd boy of low origin and a man devoid of any of the good qualities befitting a Kshyatriya. He was simply a decoit, thief or rogue, according to him. He equated Bhishma's decision to honour Krishna as an act of senility and likened Krishna as a dog snatching at a remnant of food.

Shishupala slain : At this all the kings present became very angry and immediately took up their swords and shields to kill Shishupala. That crazy king of Chedi, instead of begging apology of all those present for insulting their judgment, took out his sword and shield. It appeared that the whole assembly gathered on such a solemn occasion would become a battleground. Krishna, therefore, decided to kill him. He took up his disc and threw it at him. It immediately separated Shishupala's head from his body.

With this, the assembly became quiet, and further ceremonies were completed smoothly. The Emperor Yudhishtira rewarded all the members present in the sacrificial assembly, and sufficient *daxina* remuneration was paid to the priests and the learned sages present who had participated in performance of the sacrifice.

Because of Krishna's presence the Rajasuya sacrifice was successfully completed. After a few days' stay, Krishna with his queens and the retinue returned to Dwarka.

Bhagavata Purana states that Shishupala, even though an enemy of Lord Krishna, did receive salvation at his hands. For the Lord looks upon all with equanimity whether a friend or foe. Shishupala as a king had done some meritorious acts, such as public work for the public good and had also rewarded the learned under his charge, and had thus upheld the Vedic culture. For these acts, he deserved recognition and the Lord did recognise his virtues also.

It should be remembered that according to the Hindu tradition, even when one abuses the Lord, he is not punished for this act. Jarasandha, Kamsa, Shishupala and others were punished by the Lord for their overbearing arrogance and despotic treatment to their subjects. They were followers of the Vedic religion and culture, but that was not sufficient for them to be immune from punishment. The Vedic culture demanded that the king should rule his subjects with humility and self-denial. These kings lacked these qualities and so they were not loved by their subjects. They acted as dictators and so the Lord had to intervene to secure their end. They however got salvation because they were always thinking of Krishna the embodiment of all virtues, nay an incarnation, the supreme personality of Godhead. One who remembers the Lord, even considering Him as an enemy, His touch

in whatever form is considered auspicious and leads even such an enemy of His to salvation. On the material plane their enjoyments of power and pelf were cut short, but their spiritual enjoyments were made secure because their attachment to the Krishna-consciousness. The enemies of Krishna were men of high distinction and accomplishments. Their only fault was their selfishness. Lord's purpose is to treat all, high and low, with a sense of equality. The wicked deserved punishment and virtuous were rewarded on the material plane. On the spiritual plane, the virtuous do enjoy the bliss of salvation and the wicked do not get it. Yet whatever good things are to their credit, these are recognised and rewarded. When this store of spiritual bliss is exhausted by enjoyment, their misery again starts. This is the theory of salvation and punishment according to the Hindu culture. Each deed good or bad has its own reward or punishment.

IV

DICE-PLAY

Emperor Yudhishtira was an incarnation of unselfishness and virtue. He had, therefore, no enemies. He had earned the title. *Ajatashatru* : a person with no enemies. Yet his greatest foe was Duryodhana whom he always wished well. But he was burning with jealousy at the thought of the Pandavas' prosperity. Pandavas' greatness caused him unbearable grief.

Duryodhana wanted to step in the shoes of Yudhishtira who he felt looked like a Indra, surrounded by his five brothers, virtually the demigods in men's garb. Shakuni and Duryodhana hatched a plot to subdue this Indra amongst men, without bloodshed. In war Pandavas were superior in valour to Duryodhana. Shakuni knew the weakness of Dharmaraja who loved the game of dice, but had not the expertise in it. He suggested to Duryodhana to erect a hall and call Dharmaraja to play at it. The credit of defeating the Emperor of Bharata would belong to Duryodhana. This, Shakuni, said was the best bait to divest Dharmaraja of all that he possessed without a drop of blood being shed.

Dhritarashtra inwardly liked the idea, but he was afraid of the consequences. He intuitively felt that the destiny had been working against the interests of his sons. He, therefore, suggested that they all should consult Vidura their Prime Minister. Vidura was totally opposed to the plan. He told Dhritarashtra, Shakuni, Duryodhana, and others that this would give rise to unquenchable hatred which would bring about the ruin of their race. Dhritarashtra, however, disregarding his advice, commanded him to go to Indraprastha and invite Yudhishtira to come and play dice.

When Vidura came to Indraprastha to invite Dharmaraja, he was given a grand reception by Yudhishtira. They both discussed the plan. Yudhishtira as a Kshatriya felt that he was duty-bound to accept the invitation. He full well knew the Vedic injunction : "Don't play dice - *Akṣairmā divyah* -" Vidura had also advised him against accepting the invitation. Despite all these wise counsels Yudhishtira had a tryst with destiny. He accepted the invitation and came to Hastinapura for the fateful event, along with his brothers and retinue. He did not want to displease his uncle Dhritarashtra by refusing his invitation.

When Shakuni actually announced to Yudhishtira that the board for playing the game is spread and the time for play had arrived, Yudhishtira again stated his objection to the play, on the ground that there was scope for deceit in this particular play and for Kshatriyas to win or lose, the proper place was the battle field.

Shakuni knew the weakness of Yudhishtira and with nonchalance he pontifically asked him if he would like to play or to dither! Shakuni said : "If you are afraid don't play. But don't bring in these worn-out cliches about right or wrong." Yudhishtira was sure of defeating Duryodhana. He then challenged Duryodhana to start the play. But Duryodhana had not the expertize in dice-play. He said, "I shall supply the gems and other wealth for the stakes and Shakuni will play on my behalf." Yudhishtira again said, "Is it fair for you Duryodhana, to play by proxy?" Shakuni then exclaimed : "See he is finding excuses after excuses to go over his promise to play."

Yudhishtira now was caught in a trap. Casting caution to the winds he said : "Well! Shakuni, come on. I shall play with you."

Shakuni was an expert dice-player. Moreover he was unscrupulous to the extreme. Fate had become unkind to Yudhishtira. Before even the start of the play, the whole game was loaded against Yudhishtira. He lost continually. The more he lost, the more he seemed to have been drugged by misfortune, when everything including the clothes the Pandavas wore, were lost. Yudhishtira offered his handsome brother Nakul as a wager and lost. Sahadeva was next offered and lost. Shakuni then taunted Dharmaraja that he would not offer Bhima and Arjuna as stakes. Nakul and Sahadeo were after all his half brothers. Thoroughly reckless, as he had become, Yudhishtira talked about the virtuous life they all were leading and offered as wager Bhima, Arjuna and finally himself and lost.

Shakuni triumphantly declared that all the Pandavas have lost their empire and every other thing including their personal belongings. When the Pandavas were thus humiliated to the extreme in that tricky game played deceitfully by Shakuni, as if the cup of sorrow and indignity was not full for the erstwhile Emperor, Yudhishtira. Shakuni asked

him to bet his wife Draupadi and free himself. Yudhishtira had by then lost his mental balance. He knew not what he was doing and tremblingly said, 'I pledge her', and lost.

Draupadi's humiliation : At this finale of the game, the whole assembly of Kings and elders present there to watch the game felt that everything was lost and the end of the world had come. Duryodhana, Karna and Shakuni who were humiliated at the Draupadi-Swayamvara now shouted gleefully and commanded Vidura to bring Draupadi to the assembly hall. Duryodhana in particular said : "She must henceforward sweep and clean our houses. Let her come without delay."

At this Vidura, an incarnation of calmness and serenity, was beside himself with rage. He exclaimed : "What nonsense! You are all mad rushing to your certain destruction. You are hanging by a slender thread over a bottomless abyss! You do not see it, drunk as you are with success." He then gave his unequivocal opinion that Yudhishtira had lost all, whatsoever he possessed, his freedom, and all his rights. He had no right to stake Draupadi."

The sons of Pandu, brave as they were, had to control their anger at what their elder brother had done. After all were they not parties to the decision their brother and Emperor had taken?

Vikarna the brother of Duryodhana, a mere youth, rose up and with apparent anguish, vehemently opposed the action proposed by Duryodhana. In addition to what Vidura had said, he argued : "This whole wager is illegal as Shakuni had plotted this whole disgusting affair. He can not be a party to the game. Moreover, none can demand a specific bet as Shakuni had done. Panchali has not legally been won."

The whole assembly was stunned at what was happening, It woke up suddenly when it heard Vikarna's words and rose up with one voice and gleefully shouted : "Oh! Vikarna! you have saved Dharma."

Karna was upset at this turn of events. He wanted to avenge his defeat at the Draupadi Swayamvara. He shouted at Vikarna and said : "You a stripling have no right to utter your opinion in this assembly when other elders are present." He then turned to Duhshasana, brother of Duryodhana, and asked him to drag Draupadi to the assembly hall.

To Draupadi, this invitation to appear before all the elders of the Kuru family, as a slave of Duryodhana, was a bolt from the blue. She refused to obey the orders of Duhshasana. Whereupon he dragged her to the court. In the process, she became almost half naked. The erstwhile Empress of the Kurus was thus being insulted by one section of the Kurus themselves. She spoke harshly to all : "How is it that Dronacharya, Bhishmacharya and Vidura the great, are all silent here? How can Yudhishtira who had become a slave himself have power over me?"

Bhishma a great warrior and a selfless well-wisher of the Kurus, was found to be in a predicament. He answered Draupadi's question in a very bewildered tone. He said : "The question of what is good or bad is a very ticklish one. It is true that one who is not an owner of a particular object, cannot bet it in a wager. But you are still his wife and so he has power over you. I know that this whole affair is bad and deceitful from start to finish. Yet Yudhishtira himself considers Dharma the righteous conduct to be above everything else and further does not consider Shakuni's conduct to be deceitful. How then am I to answer your question?" It is clear that Bhishma was caught in a trap of his own making. Yudhishtira in his weak moment had been beguiled into this type of deceitful contract. Particularly not even a confirmed gambler bets his own wife as stake in such a game. Yet Yudhishtira, the Emperor and the Dharma incarnate, had done this. This itself shows that Yudhishtira had acted against his best judgement. Draupadi, therefore, categorically tells that learned assembly : "The assembly is no assembly where the sober and experienced elders are not present. These elders cannot deserve to be so called, if they do not lay down proper rules of conduct (Dharma). That is no Dharma, if it is not concerned with truth. And that is not truth which had been subjected to deceit."

“न सा सभा यत्र न सन्ति वृद्धाः

न ते वृद्धाः ये न वदन्ति धर्मम्।

नासी धर्मो यत्र न सत्यमस्ति

न तत् सत्यं यच्छलेनानुविद्धम् ॥ (यूतपर्व ६७-५२)

na sã sabhã yatra na santi vṛddāḥ

na te vṛddhāḥ ye na vadanti dharmam

nāsau dharmo yatra na satyamasti

na tat satyam yacchalenānuviddham”

Draupadi had thus propounded the proper guidelines to decide what is good or bad under particular circumstances.

Bhima was burning within himself with anger. He could not tolerate for a moment the utter discomfiture of Draupadi, for no fault of hers or the Pandavas. He put the whole blame on Yudhishtira who had crossed the bounds of Dharma. He stated : "Well! We brothers are under your command. You could give us away in a wager. But it is utter senselessness to bet Draupadi in a wager. I, therefore, cannot tolerate your action. Sahadeo, bring fire here. I shall burn your hands, Oh Yudhishtira!"

Arjuna intervened and tried to pacify Bhima by reminding him that none could insult his elder brother thus.

In the mean-while Vikarna the younger brother of Duryodhana again

intervened and agreed : "In this case sober counsel must prevail. Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and other assembled kings and elders must answer the question posed by Draupadi." When nobody was answering his question, he himself gave vent to his views : "Hunting, drinking, gambling and womanising are the four bad habits. One who is addicted to these, cannot be credited with the knowledge of Dharma. So whatever Yudhishtira has done is not according to Dharma. Further, Draupadi is the wife of all the Pandavas, not of Yudhishtira alone. Again he staked her when he had himself lost all freedom. I therefore state that Draupadi has not become a slave of Shakuni or any other." Hearing these wise words of the brother of Duryodhana every one in the assembly began clapping their hands and showering praise on him. Shakuni became the butt of censure of everybody there.

Karna was bent on humiliating Draupadi, for she had rejected him in her Swayamvar. He shouted : "This Vikarna is the enemy of his own family. Draupadi is the wife of not one but of five. I, therefore, consider her to be a harlot and not a woman of good family. She deserves to be made naked in this assembly."

Draupadi's Five Husbands : Here we should touch the point of Draupadi's marriage with five sons of Pandu.

There is not a shadow of doubt that the Indian Culture from the Vedas onwards, never favoured one woman marrying more than one man at one and the same time. In the Gopatha Brāhmana 3-20, Aitareya Brāhmana 3-23 and else where, it has clearly been laid down "एकस्य बहवो जाया भवन्ति नैकस्या बहवः सहपत्यः - *Ekasya bahavo jāyā bhavanti, naikasya bahavaḥ sahapatayaḥ* - One man may have many wives, but never one woman has several husbands together."

So the case of Draupadi is an exception to the rule. The reason given in Mahabharata is : "कुटिगता सा तु अनवेक्ष्य पुत्रान् प्रोवाच, भुङ्क्त इति समेत्य सर्वे - *Kutigatā sā tu anavekṣya putrān, provaca bhunkta iti sametya sarve*" - When Bhima and Arjuna came to the potter's cottage where they were staying in the guise of the sons of a Brahmin, in the forest and they came along with Draupadi who was won in the Swayamvara, they jokingly told their mother Kunti, "mother, we have today brought alms by begging a very good thing." There upon the mother said without looking at them, 'divide and enjoy.'

So Draupadi became the wife of five Pandavas. This cannot alone be the reason, for when Kunti saw Draupadi, she immediately apologized and said : "Through mistake, I have said that the thing brought be divided and enjoyed."

Here, it appears that the marriage with the five sons of Pandu was rather symbolic. These five were the representatives of five exceptional

qualities of Indra – the King of the heavens, namely (1) never disturbed in war – *Yudhishthira*, (2) very fearful to the enemies – *Bhima*, (3) great warrior – *Arjuna*, (4) not belonging to the mankind – *Nakula* (exceptionally handsome) (5) unlimited capacity to bear adversities – *Sahadeo* and so in actuality, though they were five, they were five aspects of one and the same divinity namely Indra. And Draupadi was that Indra's wife in her heavenly sojourn. In her current life too she wanted to marry a person like Indra with all these qualities.

These five sons of Pandu were exceptional persons amongst men and they together performed miraculous things in their life. This way they were one and so Draupadi though married to five individuals was the wife of one great heavenly entity Indra.

This marriage of Draupadi, to five at one and the same time, is exceptional in the annals of Indian literature or history, and so the explanation for this has to be exceptional. In actuality, however, in my opinion, one Draupadi cannot be the wife of the five. There were five Draupadis all alike of exceptional beauty and character. They were separately married to the five Pandavas. In Mahabharata there is no such statement and we have to leave the matter at that.

Kauravas' demonic behaviour : When therefore Karna uttered those words "deserves to be made naked" in the assembly and Duhshasana tried to strip Draupadi naked by pulling her garments, a miracle happened. She had one layer after the other of garments and he was unable to strip her naked. It is stated, that she prayed Lord Krishna to save her from dishonour and he provided her garments after garments and frustrated the efforts of the sons of Dhritarashtra and their allies.

It may be that the whole atmosphere in the Kuru-assembly was so anti-Shakuni, that none dared to touch her despite their desire to the contrary. At this Bhima with quivering lips uttered the terrible oath : "I shall rend the chest of Duhshasana and drink his heart's blood."

To save the situation going out of hand in the assembly, Vidura narrated in the assembly, the incident which took place in the days of yore.

Virochana the son of Pralhada had a scuffle with Sudhanva the son of sage Angirasa for the hand of one princess Keshini. She preferred the elder out of them. They both approached Pralhada for the decision. This caused Pralhada embarrassment as Virochana was his son and Sudhanva was the son of the sage Angirasa. Pralhada approached Kashyapa, the most revered sage of the day and posed before him the problem : "Is it my duty to answer this question? What if I give a verdict knowing it to be incorrect?"

"In the interest of social well being, it is your duty to answer this question, for you have the knowledge about the problem posed. Moreover, giving a false answer causes grief and suffering to the party who is wronged thereby. It starts a chain reaction which ultimately devours the person who is apparently benefitted by the wrong answer," advised the sage. The emphasis is on righteous conduct, for it serves the interests of all those involved. One should not be lured by short-term gains, for ultimately the wronged party is bound to avenge his wrong. Equipped with this advice Pralhada asked his son not to come in the way of Sudhanva who was the rightful suitor to Keshini's hand.

In spite of the sane advice of Vidura to those assembled in the hall of the game, none came forward to answer the question posed by Draupadi or supported the position taken by Vikarna.

At this stage Duryodhana rose up and said, "I leave it to the Pandavas themselves to answer Draupadi's question. They claim that they are bound down by the rules of Dharma. Let them deny the right of their master Dharmaraja to bet Draupadi in the wager."

Many in the assembly were surprised at this intervention of Duryodhana. He was the arch villain in this whole affair. When he left this question to be answered either by the four Pandavas or Dharmaraja, naturally many in the assembly supported his stand.

But Duryodhana though born in a Kuru family with reputation for observance of Dharma, was a mean man with low taste. Throwing caution to the winds, he bared his right thigh to the sight of Draupadi the Empress. A wretch of a man that Duryodhana was!

Bhimasena could not then control his anger. He vowed to break that thigh in a war and avenge the wrong done to his queen.

Then throwing up her arms out-stretched and raising her glowing eyes in agonised supplication Draupadi cried in a voice broken with sobs, and addressed the dignitaries in that court thus :

"If you have loved and revered the mothers who bore you and gave you suck, if the honour of wife or sister or daughter has been dear to you, if you believe in good and Dharma, forsake me not in this horror more cruel than death" (P-93 of Rajaji's Maha-Bharata 1986).

With these words she fell down and fainted.

Vidura's rebuke : Vidura then rebuked Duryodhana and his allies with the words - "You are over-crossing the bounds of decency. Dharmaraja has no authority to stake Draupadi when he himself had become a slave. Oh Duryodhana! do not listen to Shakuni the King of Gandhara. You are sure to go to ruin."

Then Arjuna also supported the stand taken by Vidura. At that stage it dawned on Gandhari the mother of Duryodhana the gravity of the situation. She was blindfolded. But Draupadi's words fell on her ears with a resounding thud. She rose and along with Bhishma, Drona and Kripacharya upbraided Dhritarashtra for his silence. They put their pressure on him to avert this impending catastrophe. They told him that if he would not exercise his authority they all would suffer untold miseries.

Wiser counsels prevailed on Dhritarashtra. He called Draupadi to his side and with sweet and reassuring words he said : "You are my very virtuous daughter-in-law. Duryodhana and others are lowly creatures to treat you thus. You prefer a boon from me and I grant."

Draupadi thereupon requested Dhritarashtra to free Dharmaraja the scrupulous follower of dharma, from being a slave. "So be it, Draupadi", and Dhritarashtra released Dharmaraja from slavery and asked Draupadi to prefer another boon. Through this she obtained the release of all her husbands, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeo from serfdom.

Dhritarashtra gave her third chance to have one more boon. But Draupadi said : "I have no right to ask more. For I shall then be considered greedy."

Mark here the magnanimity of this virtuous lady. She was not after riches, pelf and power. Her one desire was that they all should live in peace and honour.

Karna, that staunch ally of Duryodhana, was also impressed by the conduct of Draupadi. He said : "Draupadi has become the ship, who has landed these Pandavas, otherwise being sunk in the sea, safely to the shore - पांचालि पांडुपुत्राणां नौरेषा पारगाभवत् - *Pāncālī Pānduputrāṇām naureṣā pāragābhavat* (Mbh 2-73-3)."

Then Yudhishtira along with his brothers approached Dhritarashtra and bowed before him and said : "Oh! King, we are at your service."

Dhritarashtra had by now realised that Bhima had vowed to kill his sons and so they would no longer be in a position to rule peacefully. So he addressed Yudhishtira as faultless and requested him to forget the wrong done to them by Duryodhana and others. He also allowed him to take back his kingdom and all riches. He said : "Be prosperous and return to Indraprastha."

Suddenly the whole atmosphere changed. Every one felt relieved of the impending danger.

Second game : But Duryodhana and Shakuni felt that whatever they had won in the wager, had been lost by the cowardly act of the King. They therefore, hurriedly took counsel with Shakuni and came to Dhritarashtra and put forward before him another proposal.

Duryodhana said : 'Father, the Pandavas cannot be conquered in a battle. They are our enemies. They have to be destroyed. I therefore propose : Kindly invite Yudhishtira for the game again. This time the stake would be : He who loses would go into exile and live in a forest for 12 years. In the thirteenth year, they have to live incognito. If then they are detected, they have again to go into exile again for twelve years, and so on.'

Every one this time opposed the plan, but the King overruled all of them and sent the invitation to Yudhishtira to return to Hastinapur and enticed him to yet another game of dice.

Knowing full well what was in store for him, Yudhishtira agreed and returned to play the game again, and lost. Here Vyasa quotes the episode about Lord Rama being enticed by his consort Sita to bring the golden deer to her. Rama knew that there could not be a golden deer and yet he ran after it and lost his beloved wife Sita.

One redeeming feature of this new wager was : If the losing party after twelve years of exile, are not detected by the winning party, then they would be restored to their former assets.

V

PANDAVA'S EXILE

When the Pandavas left for forest clad in deer skins, Duryodhana and his brothers except Vikarna danced shamelessly and showered abusive language on Draupadi and the Pandavas. Dharmaraja kept Bhimasena under his control, otherwise he would have killed Duryodhana and Duhshasana instantly. He then vowed to kill them all when they would end their exile. Scrupulous followers of Dharma and true to their words, they meekly surrendered their Kingdom.

They then went round the hall to take leave of all the assembled Kings and elders. Vidura told them that they had really not lost, but the real losers were the Kauravas. They then bowed before Bhishma and Drona and left the hall. When Draupadi went to Kunti to take her leave, the grief expressed by Kunti for her beloved daughter-in-law and her dutiful and brave sons for their plight cannot be caught in words. Her sons and daughter-in-law, who were a short while ago moving in jewelled chariots or riding on lordly elephants to strains of auspicious music, were now walking barefoot on dusty streets to the accompaniment of loud cries of weeping crowds.

The only solace to their souls was the chanting of Sama hymns (from Samaveda) by the sage Dhaumya who accompanied them (the Pandavas) to the forest.

None including all the citizens of Hastinapura were happy at the piteous plight of the Pandavas. Many of the citizens went to the forest along with them. After Yudhishtira's earnest appeal, they left the forest and returned to their homes.

Dhritarashtra was much perturbed by the thought that the leading citizens were all angry with him and his sons. Vidura, Drona and others bluntly told him that he or his sons would not have peaceful life as they had made Pandavas their enemies. Dhritarashtra knew very well that Vidura was his well-wisher and sane advisor. Every time Dhritarashtra would ask him as to what was in his best interests, Vidura would advise him to discard his son Duryodhana and not to do anything to please him. This advice was not pleasing to the ears of Dhritarashtra, yet he was tolerating it against his wishes. Gradually his patience wore thin with repeated homilies and directed Vidura to leave him and go anywhere he liked.

Vidura went straight to the Pandavas who were then staying at Kamyaka forest. He told them how distracted Dhritarashtra had become at what he had done to them at the instigation of his sons. He found Dharmaraja calm and quiet in spite of the insults heaped on him by Duryodhana and others.

Dhritarashtra's distress : Dhritarashtra could not live without Vidura for long. Moreover, he felt that he has created one more enemy in driving Vidura to the arms of the Pandavas. He was filled with anxious remorse and sent his dutiful servant Sanjaya to Vidura with a message, "Forgive me for thoughtless words of an unhappy father. I implore you to return."

Sanjaya conveyed the plight of his master and King Dhritarashtra and told him that he would die broken-hearted if he would not return. On hearing this earnest message of his cousin Dhritarashtra, Vidura returned posthaste to Hastinapura. Dhritarashtra embraced Vidura and the differences between them were washed away in the tears of mutual affection. Vidura told him of the mighty act of Bhima in forest. He had killed invincible Kirmira the brother of the demon Baka.

Bhagawan Vedavyasa who was Dhritarashtra's real grandfather, met him when he heard of the fateful happenings at Hastinapura and advised him to make peace with the Pandavas. Dhritarashtra requested him to give proper instructions to Duryodhana. But Bhagawan asked him to seek instructions from the sage Maitreya.

When the sage Maitreya visited Hastinapura, Dhritarashtra offered him his respects and enquired of him, about how the Pandavas were doing in the forest. Maitreya then met Duryodhana and advised him to make peace with the Pandavas who were not only mighty themselves but

also were supported by the King Drupada and Krishna. Duryodhana laughed and slapped his thighs in derision. Maitraya then cursed him stating that these thighs would be broken by Bhimasena in war. At this Dhritarashtra jumped up and fell at the feet of the sage and begged forgiveness. The sage then told him : "This will not happen provided your sons make peace with the Pandavas."

Krishna's absence : When Krishna was still at Hastinapura after killing Shishupala, his Dwaraka was attacked with great force by Shalva, a mighty King and a close friend of Shishupala. Shalva was in possession of an airplane called Saubha very strong and formidable. He attacked the city of Dwaraka from sky with the help of this aeroplane and also besieged it by surrounding it with a large infantry.

In the absence of Krishna, Ugrasena his grandfather and King had organised the defence of the City very well. Dwaraka was built in the sea, and had a strong and garrisoned fortress. It withstood the siege and the reinforced attack for many days. It had ample food stocks. However, many Yadava commanders and men were slain in the battle. Ugrasena had imposed strict restrictions on drinking, gambling and amusements, during the period of the siege. All bridges connecting the city with the mainland were demolished. Foreign ships were forbidden entry into the ports in the realm. Barbed wire fencing was put around the city and ingress and egress was strictly controlled by permits and passwords. Iron spikes were planted in the moats, and ample supply of all types of weapons was constantly provided for soldiers on elephants and cavalry. Around the city they alongwith the foot soldiers were keeping constant vigil.

Recruitment to infantry, cavalry and elephant - riders was strictly on merits and the pay of all ranks was increased and given in coins of gold and silver. All complaints of soldiers were promptly enquired into and instant relief was given. None was dissatisfied and everybody felt that he was fighting to safeguard the freedom of the motherland.

Shalva's army was larger in number and well-equipped with all weapons. It had infantry, cavalry, elephant riders and charioteers. So the Yadavas suffered a great deal. Krishna's sons Pradyumna, Samba and others led the Yadava army. Shalva was in his aeroplane and from the sky he was attacking the Yadava army and so the citizens of Dwaraka were stricken with distress and nobody had a moment's peace. Everybody was constantly on the alert. Pradyumna fought bravely and nullified the tactics of Shalva by the deft use of his bows and arrows.

Krishna slays Shalva : As soon as Krishna came to know of the attack of Shalva with Saubha aeroplane and the intense fighting in Dwarka his beloved city, he took leave of Dharmaraja and arrived at Dwarka. He saw that the whole city was greatly endangered. Shalva

had developed the mystic power to be invisible. He circulated all sorts of rumours that Krishna's father Vasudeo had been killed and his mother Devaki had been arrested and so on. Krishna, at first disturbed by the news, immediately realised that when Balarama his elder brother was in charge of their defence, it could not happen. He then concentrated on his fight with Shalva. He killed Shalva's body-guards and cut off his head with his disc.

Shishupala had another friend in Dantavakra the King of Karusha. He in his anger came along with his club to kill Krishna. It was then the military rule that fighting should take place between the equals. So Krishna got down from his chariot, took his club and advanced towards that angry man. He struck Dantavakra with his Kaumudaki club, and sent him to heaven.

After this battle, Krishna visited Dwaraka and found his parents and the King Ugrasena all hale and hearty. He also joined his queens and friends in the celebration of their magnificent victory over the formidable Shalva and Dantavakra, who both had attacked Krishna's Dwaraka to avenge the death of Shishupala at the hands of Krishna.

Draupadi narrates her travails : No sooner did Krishna finish his work at Dwaraka and establish peace there, he heard of the trials and tribulations of his friends, the Pandavas. He, alongwith his Yadava friends, rushed to the forest where the Pandavas were staying. He learnt in graphic details the humiliation suffered by the Pandavas at Hastinapura and in particular the calamity that had befallen Drupadi.

Draupadi, seeing Krishna, could not control herself. She considered Krishna to be the Lord of the universe and her brother too. She narrated to him her travails thus : "Oh Krishna! how could I, the wife of the Pandavas, your close friend and the sister of Dhrishtadyumna, be dragged into that court? I was in the menses and my clothes were bloodstained. I had only one garment covering my body. I was crying loudly. In such a condition, I was forcibly drgged to the assembly of the Kurus. The sons of Dhritarashtra had become over-joyed and were laughing at such a state of mine. When the Pandavas, the Panchalas and the Vrishnis were living, these dregs of humanity were intent on enjoying me. I was in fact the daughter-in-law of such stalwarts as Bhishma and the King Dhritarashtra. Even so, they reduced me to the state of a slave. I blame the Pandavas for allowing me, their lawfully wedded wife, to be reduced to such a state. What use was the superhuman strength of Bhima or the unrivalled skill in archery of Arjuna, if they could see me humiliated thus. It is the time-worn custom, that a wife has to be protected by her husband. If the wife is protected, then the children can be protected, if the children are protected, then alone the soul can be saved. For the soul is born in a wife and so she

is called Jāyā – (जाया) the wife. The wife is also duty bound to protect her husband.

“These husbands of mine have not tried to protect me. To protect their sons from me, at least, it was their duty to protect me. The sons of Dhritarashtra have usurped our Kingdom through Adharma – unrighteous conduct.”

“Oh, Krishna! fie upon the strength of Bhima or manliness of Arjuna, if Duryodhana can live for a moment while they are breathing. This Duryodhana had driven away the Pandavas, while they were in teens busy learning their arts and crafts. He had also tried to poison Bhima in his childhood. In Pramana Koti Tirtha, while Bhima was soundly sleeping, this Duryodhana had tried to drown him in the river Ganga. Again, he had seen to it that Bhima was the victim of poisonous serpent bite. Have you heard of such villainy as that committed by Duryodhana, when he tried to burn the Pandavas along with their mother?”

Then she narrated the incidence of the demon Hidimba pouncing upon the Pandavas. Bhima because of his superhuman strength was able to kill that fierce demon. The story of the killing of Bakasura was also related to Krishna by Draupadi.

Blaming her husbands, her fate and reminding Krishna of her humiliation again and again, Draupadi shed her tears profusely. She then in a defiant mood told those present thus : “I have no husbands, no sons, no relations, no brothers, no father, not even you.” Then she reminded Krishna his duty to protect her for four reasons : (1) She was his relation, (2) her high birth, (3) her close friendship with Krishna (4) Krishna's inherent superhuman strength and skill.

Krishna assured her that all that she had suffered would be avenged even if in the process the heavens fell or the earth was split into twain or the Himalayas become shattered into pieces, or the ocean might dry up. Her brothers Dhrishtadyumna and Shikhandi and the Pandavas also pacified her by vowing terrible death to Duryodhana and others.

Then Krishna told Yudhishtira and others : ‘I would not have allowed you to play this fraudulent game at dice. I would have approached Bhishma, Drona, Dhritarashtra, and dissuaded them from allowing this game. If they would not have listened, I would have forcibly prevented this game being played. To play at dice is itself Adharma.”

He assured all help to Yudhishtira and left for Dwaraka with his sister Subhadra who was married to Arjuna. Her young son Abhimanyu accompanied them. Dhrishtadyumna also left for his capital town along with the sons of Draupadi. Others also left after promising to render whatever help the Pandavas might ask for in their hour of need.

Yudhishtira also requested the other citizens and Brahmanas to return home and allow them to stay in a forest away from the people. With heavy heart they all took leave of the Pandavas who then proceeded to stay in Dwaita forest far from the haunts of men.

Dharmaraja's unswerving faith in Dharma : When they settled in the forest, sage Markandeya met them and praised Dharmaraja for keeping his word and obeying his elders like Dhritarashtra. The sage told him the story of Lord Rama who alongwith his brother Lakshman and wife Sita had proceeded to live in a forest to abide by the pledge Dasharatha, their father, had given to his wife Kaikeyi. The sage further advised them to follow the path of truth come what may. This, he assured them, would enable them to regain their Kingdom.

But Draupadi was not pacified by these soft words of pious platitudes. She openly asked Dharmaraja : "What good would come out of such privations! We are Kshatriyas and we should fight the Kauravas and regain whatever legitimately belongs to us. Why should we suffer these slights and insults?"

Then she quoted the advice Pralhada the Daitya King had given to his grandson Bali. He had advised him to show forgiveness wherever due, but not always. It is meet and proper to forgive insults once or twice, but not always. The Kauravas had heaped insults after insults on the Pandavas, and so, according to Draupadi, the time had come to teach them a lesson which they would never forget.

Dharmaraja the abode of peace and forgiveness, softly told Draupadi to banish anger from her heart. Then alone, he said, she would know what was Dharma and what was Adharma. He posed the question : If Duryodhana was incapable of banishing anger and thinking what was proper and improper, should he (Dharmaraja) who was capable of following the path of truth, not follow it? Draupadi felt that what Dharmaraja said was not logical. She had heard "धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः *Dharmah raksati raksitah* Dharma or Truth protects those who protect it." She was sure that Dharmaraja was not discriminating what was truth and what was untruth. She could not understand why should they who did not swerve from the path of truth suffer miseries and Duryodhana and his allies immersed in sin should enjoy all the good things in life.

Dharmaraja congratulated her on her well-reasoned argument. But he pointed out the flaw in her reasoning. He said : "I do not perform a righteous act to gain good fruit out of it. I do it as a duty. Whatever is enjoined on a householder, I do. Your good deed may not give you instant good fruit. But be sure, it will do you good. Such a man gains immortality. Have no doubt about it."

Draupadi finding that her straight analysis of Dharma and adharma had proved futile on Dharmaraja, shifted her argument. She said : "I am not in favour of untruth. But if untruth were to prevail and the villains prosper, action against these is the duty of a man with a mission in life. It is the nature of the immovables to remain motionless and not that of a man of action. The society will not remain on even keel, if we were to be inactive in a situation where evil prevails and the righteousness is suppressed. Skilful action by a man doing good bears good fruit. If sacrificial acts or good public works were not to bear the expected fruit, who is then going to listen to a teacher preaching to do good?"

"Proper action at a proper time is the key to success. It is the duty of a Kshatriya to probe into the weakness of the enemy and at the opportune time crush him. He who indulges in self-denigration cannot prosper."

In these arguments, Bhimasena added his own and implored Yudhishtira to rise and be doing. He observed "By wasting our time in this forest-life, what are we to achieve? If a vulture were to seize the food ready before a lion because of its inaction, who is to be blamed? If Arjuna's unrivalled skill in archery is to be of no use to us, what is it for? By our inept policy we are seeking the prosperity of the wicked and the degradation of our righteous friends. None of us, Krishna, Arjuna, Nakul or Sahadeo or others with us, favours this insipid forest life. You are always harping on Dharma, Dharma. Is it not guise to cover your impotency in thought and belief? If we do not take action in a situation like this, the sons of Dhritarashtra will consider us to be weak and impotent. It is better to die in a war than be dubbed as impotent.

"To live in a forest and begging for living is the assigned duty of the Brahmanas. The other three varnas have no right to live thus. Particularly for the Kshatriya it is sin to live as a mendicant." Dharmaraja very politely and in milder tones, put toward his views on what is right or wrong. He said : "My dear Bhima, your words are really darts which pierce my heart. But I do not blame you for these. For it is because of my action that you all have to suffer thus."

"You know that I was induced to play at dice not to lose, but to win the kingdom of Duryodhana. But Shakuni, through deceit played with me on behalf of Duryodhana. I should have avoided playing with him. But infatuated as I was, I could not do that. However, in that very awkward situation, Draupadi came to our help. Later on Duryodhana had asked us to play one game and the stake was twelve years forest life and one year of incognito stay to one who would lose. We lost.

"If we fulfil this condition, I vow that you would rule over the

whole Kingdom of the Kurus. It is not proper for you to upbraid me thus after the event. You should have all prevented me from doing what I did, before I embarked on that action. Did you not see my sufferings in that assembly when Draupadi was being harassed by them?

"But I tell you my view of life - I prefer truth to life or even immortality. I consider Kingdom, or son, or fame or wealth as not worth even one sixteenth part of truth (righteous conduct - Satya Dharma)."

Dharmaraja's unassailable logic did not silence that redoubtable Bhimasena. He castigated Dharmaraja for his faith in (Kāla) Time. He said : "In the long run we are all dead. Time and tide wait for no man. You don't know when you will be no more. We all wish you well. We all deserve to wield sceptre. None will praise for your good and loving nature. None will care for your suffering. You parrot-like repeat cliches which sound attractive in the mouth of a teacher. You talk like a Brahmana but your birth is in a Kashtriya family. You know the duty of a Kshatriya. Your valour none can doubt. This Draupadi's fame and beauty are widespread. How can we all particularly the world famous Arjuna live incognito for a year? Can Himalayas be hidden under a handful of grass? This means that we are doomed for ever.

"We have already passed thirteen months in forest. Consider these to be thirteen years and prepare for fight with Duryodhana. For day by day he is increasing his strength by fair or foul means."

Thereupon Dharmaraja rebuked Bhimasena for his impetuosity and said : "Then to prepare for war, we have to acquire weapons which can match those of Bhishma, Dronacharya, Karna and Ashwathama. Again their treasury is full and now they are in a position of power. Uptill-now Bhishma, teacher Drona and Kripacharya have love for us. But once we start a war, indebted as they are to the King, they would use all their skill against us."

Soon Dharmaraja's great-grand-father Bhagavan Veddivyasa visited him. He saw that Dharmaraja was care-worn at the growing strength of Duryodhana and his allies. He assured Dharmaraja all his help and conferred on him the Siddhi - Miraculous power - named *Pratismriti* - the power to recall previously acquired knowledge of weapons at the right moment. He then advised Dharmaraja to acquire new weapons from Indra, Rudra and Varuna. Further he told him to move to another forest not far from the haunts of men. "Looking to the ecological balance, leave this forest as it is the true haunt of wild life and the sages engaged in austere penance."

Arjuna's wanderings to acquire new weapons : As advised by Vyasa, Dharmaraja left the forest and again came to stay in Kamyaka forest

and sent Arjuna to Indra to acquire weapons which can match those of Bhishma, Drona and others.

At this time stepping in the shoes of Arjuna's mother Kunti, Draupadi also conferred mother's blessings on Arjuna and wished him well.

Arjuna in his wanderings came to the mountain Indrakila. Here Indra met him in the guise of an old brahmin and tried to dissuade him from austerities observed to acquire new weapons. When Indra saw that Arjuna was firm in his resolve to achieve what he had set out for, he advised him to practise penance and please Lord Siva. He did so and acquired the marvellous Pāshupata weapon. With this weapon and with the knowledge he gained in his wanderings in the company of the sages, Arjuna became hundredfold stronger and much more brilliant than ever before.

It is stated that Indra, Arjuna's father, invited him to the Kingdom of the gods. There, under the supervision of Lord Indra, Arjuna obtained knowledge of many weapons-systems and also learnt the science and art of music and dancing. He stayed there for five years. But he avoided the overtures of the famous heavenly nymph Urvāshi. He had, he reminded himself, come to acquire the knowledge of the weapons system and not to dissipate his life and time in the sexual enjoyment, howsoever unparalleled.

During his stay in Swargaloka, he had learnt the art of singing and dancing.

Yudhishtira, Bhima, Draupadi and others had, in the meanwhile developed anxiety about Arjuna's whereabouts. Soon sage Lomasha brought to Yudhishtira the good news about the wonderful progress Arjuna had made in his mission of obtaining the different types of weapons.

Dhritarashtra was also anxiously making enquiries about Pandavas' forest-life. Sanjaya his confidant told him, how Krishna had assured Yudhishtira of his as well as other friends' help. Sanjaya described Yudhishtira's steadfastness in remaining true to his promise to lead thirteen years' life in a forest and elsewhere and Krishna's endorsement of it.

Krishna's Second Visit : When Arjuna returned from the abode of the King of the gods, with full knowledge of different weapons-systems, Krishna again came to meet them all in the Kamyaka forest. While praising Dharmaraja for his deep faith in Dharma, he said : "Oh Dharmaraja! you have conquered both the worlds, the earth and the heavens by your unswerving faith in Dharma. You are the master of the Vedic knowledge including Dhanurveda, the science of the weapons-systems. You do not covet wealth, nor are you after sex-enjoyment. You only love to give, to practise penance, to enjoy

intellectual pursuits, to forgive faults in others and have unbounded courage to face adversaries and difficulties. I have no doubt that you will regain your Kingdom and will look after the welfare of your subjects."

Then Krishna turned to Draupadi and gave her the cheering news that her sons also are at Dwaraka and under the guidance of Abhimanyu, Subhadra's (Krishna's sister married to Arjuna) son, are making admirable progress in Dhanurveda and allied sciences. My son Pradyumna has taken over the charge of imparting education in all the branches to his son Aniruddha, your sons and Subhadra's son. They are all progressing very well."

Again turning to Dharmaraja he assured him help from his as well as other kingly families to oust Duryodhana and his henchmen from Hastinapura.

Markandeya comforts Dharmaraja : While these exchanges of courtesies and talks were going on between Dharmaraja, Krishna and others, the sages Markandeya, Narada and others came to meet Dharmaraja.

Dharmaraja after offering the sages due courtesies, asked the sage Markandeya the question agitating his mind : "Oh! the best amongst the sages, kindly enlighten me on the problem : In what way the person, enjoys the fruits of his actions, good or bad? How does God ordain such actions?"

The sage replied : "Man enjoys the fruits of his actions—Good deed brings good rewards, bad deeds bring misery. Those who do good are born in good and pious families, while the others are born in families with low development. After all, everybody gets his birth according to his actions in his past life. The Ishvara only sees that this rule of his is rigidly followed.

"Those who lead an austere life, are versed in all lores, follow a regulated life, love truth, serve the elders, are virtuous and are of forgiving nature, have their senses under their control and are bright and of alert mind, are born in good families. Such persons are healthy, have love for the fellow-beings and perform all the duties assigned to their stage in life, always remembering their creator. These persons enjoy life in the Kingdom of the gods after their death.

"Those who are after their bodily comforts alone, cannot enjoy peaceful life. Those who follow austere way of life, have no bodily comforts, but lead a contented life. And those who study all the arts and sciences, and are virtuous in nature, and are married, lead a contented life performing all their duties with efficiency and skill. But those who have not studied the arts and sciences and are not virtuous, cannot enjoy a happy and contented married life.

"You are endowed with all good qualities, and are versed in all the arts and sciences and are after the good of your subjects. You are bound to enjoy happy and contented married life. You should have no doubt on this point. Your present trials and tribulations are the result of your weakness in playing a game of dice."

Draupadi's exemplary role as a wife : Thereafter Satyabhama, Krishna's beloved wife, finding that Draupadi has complete control over her husbands began asking her the method by which she keeps them under her thumb. Draupadi at once upbraided her for her unworthy object in asking her the question. She said, "My Dear Satyabhama, a true wife should not try to achieve her object of pleasing her husband through contrived means. No good wife should be after gaining control over husband through Mantra or Tantra i.e. through external aids like charms or black magic. Once the husband comes to know about it he would be suspicious of his wife. Moreover the expert in charms may misguide you and try to kill your beloved husband.

"I do not adopt any charms to keep them under my sway. I serve their interests and love their other wives. I do not harbour ego in my dealings with them. I always try to have control over my wayward senses and behave with them always in a gentle manner.

"I keep my house tidy and clean and cook for them or keep watch over the food cooked for them. I do not move out alone, nor do I have long talks with others who are strangers. Whatever my husbands do not like, I also dislike. I always observe my household duties and perform prescribed rituals.

"I always personally supervise the work of our domestic servants and see that no guest, no student or the teacher, or others who serve us, have cause for complaints. I also keep control over our personal income and expenditure. I always keep my husbands free to pursue their objectives, making them carefree about our domestic affairs.

"By keeping husbands pleased in all respects, a wife gets all her desires satisfied. Through self-indulgence none can gain happiness. Through hard work and self-denial alone, one can enjoy life."

Satyabhama and Krishna passed quite a few days in the company of the Pandavas, and returned home with happy memories of their stay.

Duryodhana's discomfiture : At this time the Pandavas were staying at Dvaita forest by the side of a beautiful lake. Though in a forest, they had not wasted their time in crying over the spilt milk or in sheer idleness. They had improved their knowledge of different arts and sciences, gained new weapons and learnt the art of warfare from different experts including Lord Shiva and Indra.

The Kauravas were, however, all the while gloating over their success in driving out the Pandavas, every inch superior to them. Karna and Shakuni now instigated Duryodhana to seek permission of the King Dhritarashtra to spend a few days in the enjoyment of the beauty, scenery and peaceful atmosphere of a forest not far from the Pandavas' abode. Dhritarashtra, shrewd as he was, was quite apprehensive of Duryodhana's over-bearing attitude. He felt that Duryodhana might indulge in tricks infuriating the Pandavas. Unwilling to give permission to Duryodhana for fear that he may indulge in his nefarious activities yielded to pressure as usual and allowed him to enjoy himself in Dvaita forest.

He went along with a huge army and camped there in specially erected luxurious rest houses. He wanted to show himself off and heap slights on the Pandavas in their plight.

At that very time the King of the Gandharvas was camping at the lake there, with all his paraphernalia. Duryodhana happened to see the site. He was enamoured of its bewitching beauty. He commanded his officers to erect camps on the side of the lake. When the officers got busy inspecting the lake side, they were accosted by the Gandharva's officers. The officers of the Kuru prince were asked not to put up camps there, as Chitrakṣa, the King of the Gandharvas, was already camping in the neighbourhood.

Felt insulted at the rebuke, they complained to Duryodhana who ordered them to drive Gandharvas out and put up their camps.

The Gandharvas were too powerful for them. The army of Duryodhana was routed in the skirmish. Then Duryodhana, Karna and others came out and put up a stiff fight. The Gandharvas had to beat a retreat. Then the King Chitrakṣa turned the tables against the Kauravas by using his magic weapons. Karna and others lost their chariots and weapons. They had to retreat in haste and ignominy. Duryodhana was held captive and bound hand and feet and was carried away by the King.

Bhima who was nearby was delighted at the news. But Dharmaraja did not like this attitude of Bhima. He reproved him : "This is not the time for rejoicing. Duryodhana is after all our kith and kin and we must rescue him by all means at our command" - At this time he heard Duryodhana's piteous wail asking Dharmaraja to help him out of this predicament. He ordered his brothers Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva to rescue Duryodhana from the clutches of the Gandharva King. The brothers then came out and rallied round the Kaurava army and marched against the Gandharva King. Seeing the Pandavas coming out, the King alighted from his chariot and told the Pandavas that he had no wish to fight with them. He wanted to teach a lesson to the arrogant Kaurava Prince. He then released Duryodhana and

went his way.

Disgraced thus, Duryodhana, Karna and others returned to Hastinapura. Duryodhana talked about renouncing his claim to the throne. Shakuni then interposed and said : "Be a King. This does not behove you. If you repent all what you have done so far, then return the Kingdom to the Pandavas and quit." The thought of returning the Kingdom to the Pandavas or sharing it with them was anathema to Duryodhana. As soon as he heard the Pandavas' name he regained his composure and shouted : "I shall conquer the Pandavas." Karna added his reassuring voice and said, "I shall kill Arjuna," and touched his sword in token of the oath.

Bhishma, when he heard this episode, again advised Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas. But these wise words fell on deaf ears.

Karna then had counsel with Duryodhana. With his permission, Karna proceeded on world conquest. He was no doubt a great warrior with unmatched skill, next only to Arjuna. He could conquer all the Kings and chieftains and returned to Hastinapura as a hero. Duryodhana was very much delighted at this. He wanted to emulate Dharmaraja and perform Rajasuya sacrifice in token of his recognition as an Emperor.

The Brahmanas pointed out one snag. So long as Dhritarashtra and Yudhishtira were living, he could not perform this sacrifice. He was, however, advised to perform other sacrifice named Vaishnava next in importance to Rajasuya. Accordingly it was performed with great fanfare. But many exclaimed : "Oh! this is not equal even to the sixteenth part of what Yudhishtira did."

Duryodhana then instigated by Karna declared that he would perform Rajasuya as soon as the Pandavas were killed in battle. Then Karna, puffed up as he was by his great success, vowed. "I shall not take meat or wine till I kill Arjuna in battle. Till then I shall not refuse to offer whatever is asked of me."

At this vow the Kauravas were delighted. They had now become impatient and were awaiting the day when they would kill all the Pandavas in a battle.

The Pandavas were very particular not to disturb the ecological balance. Dharmaraja saw that many wild beasts and animals were being killed by their presence in Dvaita forest. Many trees and other plants and creepers were also cleared off to make way for their smooth movement. He, therefore, took counsel with his brothers, his wife Draupadi and the sage Dhaumya and left the forest and moved to Kamyaka which was the haunt of many sages and others.

This way the Pandavas had passed over eleven years in the forest. They became now much more experienced with clear ideas about what is Dharma and what is not. Dharmaraja used to pass many sleepless nights at the thought of the miseries, his brothers and wife had to undergo because of his folly.

Durvasa's visit to the Pandavas : While he was in such a mood Vyasa came to visit them. He assured him by saying : "None gets here unqualified happiness or misery. He who practises penance alone enjoys real happiness. The sun rises and sets. This also is true of happiness and misery. They come and go. One should imbibe this truth of life and live happily and well. Enjoy happiness when it smiles on you, and suffer misery with equanimity when it is your lot to.

"Nothing is impossible to obtain with right efforts. Righteous conduct ensures happiness. With righteousness as your nature, you do not feel the pangs of sorrow. Such a man also enjoys good health.

"Man has a passion for wealth. This passion is the cause of sorrow. So learn to give, not to covet, wealth. Earn wealth through righteousness and give it to those who deserve. If you earn wealth through covetousness and greed, then if you give it away, happiness cannot be your lot.

"Don't, therefore, grieve for what is lost. You will regain all what you have lost through sustained and right effort."

Duryodhana wanted Yudhishtira to incur displeasure of some great sage, so that through his curse, Yudhishtira would fall from his grace and meet his ruin. While he was thinking thus, an opportunity presented itself to him. One day, Durvasa the great sage visited Duryodhana. The sage with his thousands of disciples was entertained to lavish feasts by Duryodhana and his brothers. At such a royal attention, Durvasa was very much pleased and asked Duryodhana as to what he can do for him.

"Oh! sage! You know my brother Yudhishtira is living in a forest. Please be his guest also with all your ten thousand disciples. So that he can also receive the boon like us."

Duryodhana knew that it was Draupadi's custom to serve food to her family members and guests and then have her food and retire. In the afternoon, Duryodhana thought she would not have food left as the Pandavas were living from hand to mouth. Durvasa had a terrible temper. He always loved to test great men by presenting to them seemingly unsurmountable problems to solve.

Duryodhana, Karna and Kaurava brothers felt that this stratagem of theirs would bring sure ruin to the Pandavas and they would not return to claim their share of the Kingdom. They were overjoyed at such

a lucky turn.

Durvasa visited the Pandavas at a time, when there was no food left for the day for such unexpected guests. Yudhishtira welcomed the sage with his thousands of disciples with folded hands and offered them proper seats. The sage told him : "We are hungry. Please keep the food ready by the time we return from our evening ablutions."

Because of the austerities practised by Dharmaraja, the Sungod had given him a wonderful vessel *Akshayapatra* which held a never-failing supply of food for the twelve years they were in the forest. The only condition was that the guests would be served first, then the Pandavas would have their share. Draupadi would have her meal last. Then the vessel would be empty, and denuded of its power for the day.

Durvasa had come at the time when the vessel had lost that power for the day. At a loss to know how to tide over her calamity, she fervently prayed Lord Krishna to rescue her out of such a plight. Krishna as if by a miracle appeared before her. But strangely enough instead of enquiring about her difficulty, he requested her for food. She had felt relieved when she had seen him. But with such a request from Krishna, she became speechless, thinking that the calamities would never come singly.

Soon she got out of her confusion and begged Krishna to save her from the danger of the curse of Durvasa. But Krishna insisted on seeing the vessel. And lo! When the vessel was brought before the Lord, he saw a tiny leaf of vegetable and grain of rice sticking to the seam of that vessel. Krishna ate that greedily and gave out a satisfied belching sound.

Then Bhima was asked to go to the river and invite the sage and his disciples for the food kept ready at Draupadi's cottage. At this the sage and his disciples experienced the feeling of complete satisfaction of the hunger and began giving out belching sounds violently. Out of fear of the discomfiture at Draupadi's cottage, and the possibility of being cursed by the virtuous Pandavas, the sage and his disciples took to heels and disappeared from the scene. The point is that to the virtuous no curse from anybody can touch. Lord looks after the welfare of the pious and condemns the evil-minded. The evil appears to triumph for a short while. But the conviction of Hindus is that 'truth alone triumphs.' Rama, Krishna and Dharmaraja did suffer. But through their sufferings, they have become immortal.

Karna's Generosity : As the days in the forest life were nearing their end, Dharmaraja began brooding over the vicissitudes they might have to face in the life thereafter. He was particularly concerned about the vow taken by Karna to kill Arjuna in battle. He considered Karna

to be a fighter of the first order.

This problem was very much softened by Indra, the father of Arjuna. He assumed the form of a Brahmin and came to Karna and urged him to part with his earrings and armour as a gift. Indra knew that Karna had vowed to gift away whatever was requested of him.

Here it is necessary to relate the story of Karna's birth. Kunti in her maiden days was with her adoptive father Kuntibhoja the cousin of Krishna's grandfather Shurasena. Her name in her father's (Shurasena) house was Prithā. Because she grew in Kuntibhoja's palace, she came, to be known as Kunti. While living with her adoptive father the sage Durvasa happened to stay there for a year. Kunti served the sage with due care, patience and devotion. Pleased with her service, the sage granted her five divine *mantras*, through the repetition of which she would get sons equal in valour and strength to the God, whom she would invoke. The gods involved in these five mantras were : The Sun, the Dharma (God Yama), the Wind, the Indra, and the Ashwini twin gods.

Impatient with the curiosity of a youth, she repeated one Mantra invoking the sun who was brightly shining in the sky. At once the Sun god came in person and told her that he had been drawn to her because of this Mantra. Kunti was mortally afraid of the scandal that would torment her throughout her life. The Sun god however assured her that no blame would attach her and that she would immediately be restored to her virginity as soon as she would give birth to a son.

She immediately got a bright and beautiful son as resplendent as the sun. But then the problem arose as to what she should do with the son. She could not raise him as her child. That could have raised the scandal. So to hide her fault, she placed the child carefully in a box and set it afloat in a river.

A childless charioteer happened to see the box floating in the river. He picked it up and finding a very handsome, bright, and healthy boy in the case, joyfully handed him to his wife Radha. It is because of this episode that Karna was known as Radheya—the son of Radha as well as Sutaputra the son of a driver. Nobody then knew of his Kshatriya lineage.

Karna was born with the earrings and the armour. Kunti could recognize him as her son through his earrings and shining armour.

This natural armour protected Karna from any bodily injury. Indra demanded it of him. The sun god had warned him not to part with it. But Karna, true to his word, would not refuse the gift sought of him by Indra. He, therefore, cut off the earrings and the protective

armour and gave them to the Brahmana.

Indra surprised and shamed into generosity, revealed himself. He bade Karna to ask for any boon he wanted. Karna asked of him his Shakti the strongest weapon of Indra. He parted with it and gave it to Karna with the proviso that it would be useful only at one time and then it would return to him.

Dharmaraja's encounter with Yaksha : While the Pandavas were counting days for the completion of the twelfth year, they decided to move to the Dvaita forest from which they could move incognito to somewhere else. Kamyaka forest had almost become the busy habitat. To move off it incognito could have been difficult. Moreover Dvaita was a beautiful forest with lakes and dales.

One day, while they were discussing their future plans, a Brahmana came running conveying them his tale of woe. His fire kindling mortar which was kept covered in a cloth on the branch of a tree, accidentally got entangled in the horns of an antelope while it happened to rub its body against the tree. Frightened at this the antelope began running wildly with the mortar in its horns. With the mortar lost, fire could not be kindled. The Brahmana was afraid, he would not be able to perform the sacrifices.

When the Brahman related this incident to the Pandavas, they at once started in search of the antelope. They wandered far and wide, but they could not sight it. Tired they sat under the thick shade of a Peepal tree.

Nakul who was by the side of Dharmaraja spoke to him thus : "Oh King! In our family Dharma is strictly observed. Moreover, none of us is idle and so wealth is also being produced by us. We have also tried to remove the afflictions of others. Then why, oh brother, why have we to suffer thus?"

Yudhishtira told him : "My dear brother, there is no end to our difficulties. There is also no special reason why it is our lot to suffer them. Nor can we predict their cause. They just come according to our Prarabdha - that accumulated fruit of our past actions."

Bhima's reaction was quite the opposite. He shouted, "Since I did not slay Duryodhana when he had ordered his servant to bring Draupadi to the assembly, where the game of dice was being played, these difficulties are visiting us on and often."

Arjuna's reaction was also similar to Bhima, He said, "Since I did bear the very heart-rending words of Karna regarding Panchali, these difficulties recur again and again."

Sahadeo also added his voice in support of Arjuna. Dharmaraja was

suffering from pangs of thirst. He requested Nakula to find out whether there was water somewhere in the vicinity. Soon Nakula located pure sparkling water in a nearby lake and rushed there to drink it and then carry it to his brothers, who were all feeling terribly thirsty.

Before he could actually enter the lake, Nakula heard a voice in the air : "Oh! Son of Madri. This lake belongs to me. First answer my questions and then drink it, otherwise you die."

Nakula ignored the voice and drank. No sooner did Nakula drink water of the lake, ignoring the warning, he died and fell on the ground. Sahadeo then followed in search of his elder brother and found him lying dead on the ground. Sahadeo did likewise. Arjuna and Bhima met with the same fate. Their superhuman strength was of no avail there.

Dharmaraja himself then had to go in search of his brothers. He found them all lying dead by the side of the lake. He searched hither and thither for the culprit, but he could not trace the foot-prints. He then felt that the lake-water must have been poisoned. With this thought in mind, as soon as he proceeded to enter it, he heard the same voice as his brothers had heard before. The Yaksha told him : "Your brothers instead of answering my simple questions, began boasting of their strength. Arjuna actually used all the weapons and missiles in his armory. But they were of no avail to him."

He listened to the voice carefully and asked : "Who are you my Lord?"

Yaksha, tall as a tree and bright and shining as a fire, was seen sitting on a tree. Dharmaraja politely told him that he would not claim mastery over the lake. He added : "I do not boast, I know all the answers to your questions. But please ask, I shall try to answer to the best of my ability."

"Yaksha, who was pleased with the humility and composure of Dharmaraja, shot back at him his first question.

These questions and answers are very illuminating. They are worth noting in detail. They are on ethics.

"What makes the sun shine everyday?"

"Brahman" was the quick answer.

"What makes man learned?"

"The study of the Vedas."

"What makes man great?"

"Hard work."

"What makes him overcome difficulties?"

"Courage."

"What gives him experience?"

"Devotional service of the elders."

"What makes a Brahmana venerable?"

"The study of the Vedas."



Hereafter only answers are given. For it is easy to guess the questions. The righteous love hard work. Man is mortal. The evil-minded talk ill of the others.

The Kshatriyas' greatness lies in learning the science and art of using weapons. They should encourage performance of sacrifices and offer shelter to the needy.

Water is the primary need of the cultivators. Maintenance of cows gives them wealth and prestige.

It is the householder's duty to look after the well-being of godly type of persons, the guests, the servants, his family members and his own self.

Mother who brings up her children is nobler and more sustaining than the earth.

Father's position is higher than the Sky. Mind is fleeter than wind. A sorrow-stricken heart is more blighted than withered straw.

Fish does not close its eyes while sleeping. The egg though born does not move. There is no heart in a stone and the river flows down rapidly. Learning and the company of the other travellers befriends a traveller. A wife is the friend of a householder. A Vaidya (medical man) is the friend of a diseased person. The good deed accompany a man in his journey after death.

Fire is the good guest of everybody. Cow's milk is like a nectar. The Sanatana Dharma is permanent, unchangeable and can never be destroyed.

The earth which contains all within itself is the biggest vessel. Good conduct leads one to happiness, pride brings in hatred. Abandon it and you get love. Give up anger and you don't have to suffer unhappiness. Give up excessive desire and you become rich. Abandon greed and you get happiness.

Always be careful to follow the path of truth. Give away whenever and whatever you can. Be not cruel to others. Follow the Vedic path. Always keep control over your mind. Keep company of the good.

He who knows the path of good conduct is a learned person. He who does not believe in his creator is an atheist. He is also called a fool for he does not know the purpose of life. Covetousness is the bane of life. Jealousy is the fire which burns your heart.

Ignorance causes pride. To proclaim your virtuousness is vanity. To blame others is petty-mindedness.

A man does not become a brahmana by birth or learning. A man's good conduct alone is the test of being a brahmana. It is the bounden duty of a brahmana to be particularly careful of the path he follows. If he falls in bad ways, instantly he is reduced to a lower class. This is my decisive opinion.

Learned is he who practises what he preaches.

He who does good and speaks good is loved by all. He who undertakes to do anything after mature deliberations gains better success. He who has many good friends lives happily. And he who lives by Dharma lives contentedly.

He who is not under anybody's debt and he who does not undertake a difficult tour, or he who gets food at his home once in five or six days is a happy person. Thus many questions were posed by the Yaksha – a heavenly being and Dharmaraja gave appropriate answers as noted above. Yaksha was very much pleased. He now asked him the last question : "What is the greatest wonder in the world?"

Dharmaraja answered : "Oh Yaksha! Man sees everyday creatures depart to the abode of the God of Death. Yet he desires to live in his bodily frame forever."

Yaksha was mightily pleased at this very perceptive answer. He said, "May I ask you one more question?" Dharmaraja approvingly nodded. The Yaksha asked him, "Who is the wealthiest person in this world?"

"Oh, Heavenly resident! He is the wealthiest, whose fame for his righteous actions has reached not only all the corners of the globe but also the heavenly bodies. Again, the man who never loses his equipoise in pleasure or pain is the wealthiest. In short a yogi (whose total mental faculties are under his control) with a cheerful frame of mind suffers irresistibly for the good of his fellow-beings and still is at ease, is the wealthiest."

Yaksha then asked Dharmaraja to seek restoration of life for one of his dead brothers. Dharmaraja without pausing for a moment, requested Yaksha to revive Nakula.

Yaksha was surprised at his choice. He asked Dharmaraja to explain.

“धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

तस्माद् धर्मं न त्यजामि मा नो धर्मं हतो अवधीत ॥

*Dharma eva hato hanti, dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ
tasmād dharmam na tyajāmi, mā no dharma hato avadhīta*

(Mbh - Vanaparva - 313 - 128)

If Dharma is not followed scrupulously, it will kill the doer. If Dharma is followed, it will protect the doer. It is because of this, I always follow the rules of righteous conduct. If these rules are not followed in letter and spirit, the doers will be undone." Dharmaraja further explained that Bhima and Arjuna were not the protective shields as was Dharma. Yaksha congratulated Dharmaraja for his impartiality and restored all his brothers to life.

Dharmaraja was very much delighted at this strange denouement. He happily returned to his cottage along with his beloved brothers. Draupadi, at a loss to know anything about the Pandavas' whereabouts, was overjoyed to see them all returning unscathed.

This episode brought home to all the brothers, the inherent strength, greatness and capability of their elder brother who was rightly called Dharmaraja the King amongst the virtuous. Yaksha was in fact Yama the God of Death and the father of Dharmaraja. He had taken the form of the antelope as well as Yaksha to test his son's integrity. He then blessed Dharmaraja with the words : "You will live the thirteenth year incognito with the King Virata. You all will not be discovered."

"You will again conquer greed, infatuation and anger. You will also have passion to give, to love truth and to work hard. This is your desire and will be fulfilled." Antelope was soon discovered and the Brahmana got his mortar.

Pandavas' exile ends : The Pandavas' twelve years of forest life was nearing its end. They had to suffer a lot. But with flying colours they came out of all these trials and difficulties. Their gains were also innumerable. Arjuna acquired many new weapons and also gained mastery over their use. Through the crucible of suffering, they emerged as better and nobler men mature in experience and with wider outlook. All the brothers lived together and had deep attachment for each other. Dharmaraja the eldest enhanced his reputation tenfold by remaining steadfast in his resolve to follow Dharma come what may.

All parting in life is sad. It was now time for the Pandavas to take leave of sage Dhaumya and the other Brahmanas with whom they had passed their life of twelve years with joy in their hearts. With tears in their eyes, they disguised themselves as domestic servants and obtained service at the palace of the King Virata of Matsya Desh far from Hastinapura.

Staying incognito at Virata's palace : Dhaumya advised them to speak as little as possible and restrain themselves in every situation while

performing domestic service in the palace. They engaged themselves in small but uncongenial tasks. Draupadi with her name Sairandhri was employed as maid servant to Sudeshna the Queen of Virata. Kichaka the brother of Sudeshna and Commander-in-Chief of Virata's army happened to see Draupadi and was immediately infatuated by her bearing and beauty. Seeing that she was merely a maid servant of his sister, he openly made advances to her and expressed his uncontrollable desire to enjoy her.

Nearly eleven months had passed of the Pandava's stay in Virata's palace. In the last month this apparently insurmountable calamity appeared to set at naught what they had suffered and achieved during the earlier thirteen years. Bhima was Ballava by name, the cook in the palace.

One day with the connivance of his sister Sudeshna, Kichaka planned to drag Draupadi to his bed. Sudeshna along with Sairandhri attended feast at Kichaka's house at night. Then she asked her to take a golden bowl to Kichaka's inner apartments and bring her a jug of wine. However hard she refused to go inside, Sudeshna was bent on sending her. Draupadi could not refuse.

As soon as Draupadi entered Kichaka's inner apartment to fetch the jug of wine for Sudeshna the Queen, Kichaka approached her and prayed for her company that night. Draupadi spurned the offer and ran out of the apartment speedily. Kichaka followed her and caught her hand. She dragged him to the King's Chamber where Kanka and the King were playing at the game of dice. Kanka was Dharmaraja disguised as Brahmana counsellor and friend to Virata.

Virata and Dharmaraja seeing Kichaka and Draupadi thus engaged in a scuffle simultaneously asked : "What is the matter?" The others present rebuked Kichaka and said : "Why are you harassing a friendless and hapless woman?"

Dharmaraja outwardly at least posed that he was unaffected by the incident and said : "Why are you, beautiful woman! causing us trouble? We are engaged in a game of dice. Please don't obstruct us. Be away from here. Don't worry. Some Gandharva will kill your tormentor." Thus he suggested her to approach Bhima who as cook was in the Queen's inner apartment.

"I shall always remain true to my Gandharva husbands. The eldest of them is always fond of the game of dice." Taunting Dharmaraja thus, she ran to the inner apartments of the Queen Sudeshna.

Kichaka, exposed thus, suffered discomfiture and repaired to his apartment. Draupadi was terribly upset at Kichaka's attempts to molest her. She would not eat or sleep. She was all the while crying and vowing : "My Gandharva husband would soon be slaying this sinner Kichaka."

She then came to Bhimasena – Ballava in the King's palace kitchen and narrated to him the whole incident. Then they planned to call Kichaka to the dancing hall at night. Bhima would then kill him.

Kichaka next day came to Sairandhri and pleaded : "You have seen that nobody could raise a finger against me even when I had kicked you in the King's chamber. Be therefore kind to me, and make me your slave."

Draupadi in a soft tone said : "If you want me, then come alone tonight at the dancing hall when nobody would be there. My Gandharva husbands or anybody should not see us together."

The dancing classes were conducted by Brihannala (Arjuna, disguised as lady dance-teacher). They were always over by nightfall and nobody was inside. Bhima stealthily entered it as planned. Under cover of darkness, he slept on the coach there covering himself from head to foot.

Under the impression that Sairandhri (the slave girl) was sleeping on the coach, Kichaka, with perfume smeared all over his body and beside himself with the pleasurable prospect, entered the hall and approached the coach. He placed his hand softly on Bhima's shoulder, and said in a cajoling tone. "Oh beautiful Lady! I am always the object of high praise by my very attractive wives. But I have left them all and have come to your feet."

Bhima got up from the bed instantaneously and addressed Kichaka thus : "Oh Sinner! experience my strength now. You will now reap the fruit of molestation of Sairandhri." And without waiting for his reply, Bhima seized Kichaka's locks. Kichaka was a man of super-human strength and immediately freed himself and pounced upon Bhima as a tiger. They fought as two lions for long. When Bhima saw that Kichaka was showing signs of exhaustion, he lifted him up and circling him round for long, threw him down on the ground with force and caught hold of his neck. Then pounding and kneading his body into a shapeless lump of flesh, Bhima sucked the life out of Kichaka and ran to Draupadi to convey the glad tidings. Bhima then went to his kitchen, had a bath, rubbed his body with sandal paste and slept soundly.

Draupadi thereafter awoke the guards at the door and told them that Kichaka had been put to death by her Gandharva husbands, when he had come to molest her.

When Kichaka's brothers and relations heard this terrible news, they rushed to the spot and seeing Kichaka dead, they approached the King Virata and requested him : "This woman is a witch. Let she be burnt along with Kichaka." Draupadi was then tied to the funeral pyre and taken to the burning place. While she was thus being carried to the

cemetery, she cried aloud for help. Hearing the loud but piteous wails of Draupadi, Bhimasena got up from his bed and rushed to the cemetery. He disguised himself as a Gandharva, made short work of those who were carrying Sairandhri and freed her from their clutches.

The citizens fearing that she was really a wife of a Gandharva approached Sudeshna the Queen and requested her to throw Sairandhri out. Sudeshna agreeing with the citizens asked her to quit. Hardly a month was left to complete the thirteenth year. So, she requested the Queen to take pity on her and allow her to stay there only for about thirteen days. She said : "Oh Good lady! Bear with me for only thirteen days. My Gandharva husbands would then come over here and take me away. I would not forget your obligations. They would do good to you all. Be good to me now."

Sudeshna now believed that Sairandhri was really being protected by the Gandharvas. Lest some misfortune might befall on her husband, if she were to refuse her request, she allowed her to stay.

Seizure of Virata's cows by Duryodhana's forces : Duryodhana's spies were busy in finding out the whereabouts of the Pandavas. But they were not in a position to raise even a suspicion about somebody some where. They had come to know about the murder of Kichaka by a Gandharva. The spies carried this information to Duryodhana. Kichaka was a mighty commander who had defeated the King of Trigarta.

Duryodhana suspected that this Gandharva must be some Pandava in disguise. He immediately held consultations with Bhishma, Drona and Kripacharya. They permitted him to make a search of the Pandavas at the capital of Virata. Susharma the King of Trigarta who was defeated earlier by Kichaka offered himself to be at the command of the army invading the Matsya desha. He proposed that he would invade the country and get hold of thousands of cows belonging to Virata. Then the Kauravas should also follow him the next day. They calculated that this invasion would prove double-edged. If they detect the Pandavas he would send them away for another thirteen years. Otherwise they would be the masters of Virata's immense cattle wealth.

According to the plan thus agreed upon between Susharma and Duryodhana, the army of the Trigarta King invaded the Matsya country and took thousands of cows of Virata and began driving them away. The cowherds fought bravely with the Trigarta army with whatever they could catch hold of. But ultimately they were overpowered and the cows were being driven away by the Trigarta soldiers.

When the news reached the capital of Virata, he called the assembly to decide on the course to deal with Susharma. The assembly decided to make preparations for war. They all started with great speed and

just before sunset, they fell upon the army of Trigartas. Both the armies fought bravely, but as was the custom, they ceased fighting at sunset.

Next day again the fight was started. But unfortunately, in the battle the King Virata was caught by Susharma who tied him to the chariot and drove away with him speedily.

Seeing the rout of Matsya army after the capture of Virata, Kanka (Dharmaraja in disguise) who had accompanied Virata alongwith Ballava (Bhima), commanded Ballava to enter the fray and fight in such a way as would not disclose his identity.

Bhimasena first with his bow and arrow and next with his club, fought fiercely and killed thousands of Susharma's soldiers. Dharmaraja, Nakula and Sahadeo also entered the fray and killed many of Susharma's soldiers. Then Susharma was himself captured. The sons of Pandu freed Virata and all of them returned to the capital along with the cows captured by Susharma.

While the King himself was thus engaged in battle with Susharma who had invaded the Kingdom from the south, Duryodhana along with his big army marched against the capital from the north. He captured many of the cows despoiling many of the cattle ranches. Immediately the news of attack was conveyed to the Prince Uttara who was in charge of the capital in the absence of the King. The local leaders requested him to stop this invasion. Uttara proudly asserted that he would repel the attack only if he would get a good charioteer.

Sairandhri immediately told him to take Brihannala as his charioteer, for he was once the successful charioteer of Pandava Prince Arjuna. He had to agree for he had none other in view. With proper show of hesitation and diffidence Brihannala (Arjuna in disguise) assented. Then they set off to the place where the Kauravas had rounded up the cows.

When Uttara sighted the large force of the Kauravas, led by Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Duryodhana, he developed cold feet and requested Brihannala to turn back the chariot. Brihannala laughed at this and said : "Oh Prince! the women will laugh and call you a coward." Uttara had lost all confidence. In desperation and in a quivering voice he requested Brihannala to turn the chariot back. When he refused, Uttara cast off his bows and arrows, got down from the chariot and began speeding up to his capital.

Brihannala ran after him, seized him, dragged him and made him sit in the chariot by force. He then told him : "Do not be afraid. I shall fight for you. And you will have the glory." The Pandavas before accepting the services as domestic servants at Virata's palace,

had the biggest problem to solve. They had acquired so many different types of weapons. How to hide them? These weapons were so important that the Pandavas could not afford to lose them.

Arjuna's Weapons : Arjuna, during the twelve years, had wandered far and wide. He had noticed one thick forest of thorny bushes. Dharmaraja directed Nakula and Sahadeo to the forest and keep these in the cavities of the trees. Further, as a precaution, they made an artificial corpse looking like that of an old huntress, to hang from the tree. This device worked. People were afraid to go near or touch that tree.

While the strange drama, with the actors Brihannala and Uttara, was being acted before the very eyes of the Kaurava heroes like Bhishma, Drona and others, Drona watching the movements of Brihannala had a suspicion : "Is he Arjuna?"

Drona's heart expanded with love for his most accomplished disciple Arjuna and began lavishing high praise on him. Karna stopped him, rebuking him with the words :— "You are partial to Arjuna. He is not worth even one sixteenth of my or Duryodhana's valour."

Thereupon Duryodhana supported his bosom friend and said : "What if he is Arjuna? We shall send the Pandavas again for another twelve years of forest life. If he is not, we shall kill that eunuch and carry away the cows."

As soon as Arjuna was mentioned, even Bhishma, Drōna, Kripa and Ashwathiyama, Drona's son, began showering high praise on him.

Uttara even if he was forced to a seat in the chariot was trembling in his shoes. Then Brihannala disclosed his identity and told him : "I am Arjuna. Don't have fear. I shall defeat the Kauravas and you will have the glory of winning this battle."

Uttara then begged pardon of Arjuna and said : "How fortunate I am! Your presence has put heart and courage into me. I shall do whatever you tell me."

Arjuna then drew the chariot to the thorny forest nearby and requested Uttara to climb up the trees and get all the weapons. Uttara said : "How can I, a Prince, touch a corpse? Moreover, I am a Kshatriya and also versed in the science of Mantra and sacrifice. I cannot touch a filthy thing as a corpse."

Arjuna assured him that it was not a corpse, it was only a bugbear. Uttara then did what he was told and obtained weapons hidden there and put them in the chariot. Arjuna then explained the character and quality of the weapons. He also disclosed the identity of all his brothers and his wife. Uttara had still some doubt. He expressed these and said : "You are alone here. How can you fight Duryodhana assisted

by all the Kaurava forces?" Arjuna assured him by relating to him his single handed combats with the Gandharvas when they had captured Duryodhana and were carrying him tied to their chariot. Uttara then agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer and drove the chariot to the battlefield.

Arjuna blew his conch Devadatta and the twang of his Gandiva bow reverberated in the air and caused palpitation in the hearts of the Kaurava soldiers. Drone said anxiously : "Arjuna has come."

Duryodhana was critical of Drona's partiality for Arjuna. He said to Karna : "The thirteenth year has not yet ended. Arjuna has disclosed his identity. Now they have to go to the forest life, for another twelve years."

Karna was boastful. He said "I can fight Arjuna single-handedly" Kripa rebuked Karna for his tomfoolery. Karna abused Kripa by saying : "You, a scholar in the Vedas, have no business here, particularly when you shower praise on our enemies" Ashwathiyama could not tolerate this affront to his maternal uncle. He scolded Karna and said : "Oh You braggart! Kshatriyas do not seize Kingdoms by cheating at dice. Have any one of you ever defeated the Pandavas in any battle? Was it honourable for you to drag Draupadi in the assembly and try to dishonour her chastity. Oh you fools! Your idle vainglory and Shakuni's expertise at cheating cannot win battles for you."

Bhishma intervened and said : "Karna, as a Kshatriya you are always for fight. At this critical juncture, let us consider what is proper for us. Let us not highlight our differences or insult our teachers."

Ashwathiyama in defending his father, explained : "Acharya Drona showered praise on Arjuna, not to create differences amongst us, but to give vent to his pent-up feelings on remembering the insults heaped on the Pandavas."

Duryodhana then begged pardon of Drona and requested him to tell them what to do.

Drona said : "Let us arrange our battle lines, so that Duryodhana is well protected. In the mean-while Bhishma may give his verdict as to whether the Pandavas have completed the thirteenth year or not."

Bhishma calculated and told them : "The Pandavas have completed thirteen years five months and twelve days according to lunar calendar." According to solar year, they had completed thirteen years and six days. He then advised Duryodhana to seek peace with the Pandavas. Duryodhana would not listen to this wise counsel. He preferred war and as suggested by Drona, he remained in the rear and drove away the cows towards Hastinapura.

Arjuna, observing this strategy reverently saluted Drona, Bhishma and others, did not engage them in fight. He turned his attention to Duryodhana and reached that place. He then asked his cowherds to surround the cows and drive them away to the capital of Virata.

Arjuna then fought his way through the lines formed by Karna, Drona, Kripa, Bhishma and Ashwathiyama. When they all became weary, he allowed them to withdraw from the battle and reached the spot where Duryodhana was in his chariot ready to give him fight. He was also defeated. He fled away from the battlefield. Nobody had the heart to fight Arjuna who could, therefore, defeat all of them single handedly. They all had not expected that they would have to fight Arjuna and had not therefore, come fully prepared. Arjuna with his newly acquired weapons, could defeat them easily. When Virata got the news that the captured cows had been brought back by the cowherds, he began praising the valour of his son Uttara. Kanka, (Dharmaraja in disguise) apprised the King of the valour of Brihannala. The King was naturally infuriated and struck Kanka with his fists. Blood began oozing from Kanka's nose. Sairandhri (Draupadi in disguise) seeing this rushed to nurse him.

While this tragic-comic Drama was being enacted at the palace of Virata, Uttara and Brihannala came to visit the King. Dharmaraja told the doorkeeper to allow Uttara alone. Otherwise, he felt that seeing this wound, Arjuna would inflict blows on the King.

Uttara came inside and saw Dharmaraja bleeding and Draupadi nursing his wounds. He had then the knowledge that Kanka was none else than Dharmaraja and Sairandhri was Draupadi. He apprised his father of the whole situation.

Virata felt guilty and offered his whole Kingdom to them and his grand-daughter Uttarā to Arjuna.

Arjuna a cultured man of complete sense control thanked the King and said : "I have worked in your inner apartments and seen this young girl often. She is like a daughter to me. I accept her as my daughter-in-law, the bride for my eldest son Abhimanyu."

Thereafter, the Pandavas chose Upaplavya the next important town in Matsya country for their residence. Krishna, Balarama and the Yadava heroes came there with their armies. Other Kings also who were Pandava's friends came and met Dharmaraja. Draupadi's brother Dhristadyumna also came to visit the Pandavas at Upaplavya.

The King Virata was very happy at the denouement, that the Pandavas came out of the ordeal of the thirteen years of exile, unscathed. He performed the marriage ceremony of his grand-daughter Uttara with Abhimanyu with great eclat. He gave in dowry thousands of horses,

two hundred elephants and countless wealth.

Arjuna-Subhadra marriage : It would be interesting to relate here the story of Arjuna-Subhadra marriage.

One day, while the Pandavas were peacefully ruling at Indraprastha a Brahmana came crying to the palace. His cows were stolen away by the thieves. Arjuna was on the scene. He immediately rushed to the store-house of weapons. On his way, he happened to pass by the place where Dharmaraja and Draupadi were together. This was an accident. It was agreed amongst the brothers that when Draupadi and some one were together, others were not to disturb them. If some one did he was to be away for twelve years.

Arjuna was between two stools. He had to take the weapons from that place and rescue the cows of the Brahmana from the hands of the thieves. He had broken the rule of conduct agreed upon between the brothers. Dharmaraja did pardon him for the act not done through deliberate choice. Yet Arjuna wanted to be true to the word, and left the palace on pilgrimage.

On his peregrinations, once he happened to be with his bosom friend Krishna at Dwaraka. He happened to see there Subhadra, the sister of Krishna. She was of bewitching beauty. He felt attracted towards her. He thought of marrying her. Krishna sensed his mind and offered him his help in the matter. Though his father Vasudeo and Subhadra had agreed to the proposal, yet there was one great obstacle. Balarama was thinking of marrying her to Duryodhana.

Krishna and Arjuna then hatched a plan : Arjuna was to carry her in a chariot to Indraprastha when all the Yadavas would be enjoying the festival on the mountain Revataka. Dharmaraja's permission was also obtained.

While Subhadra came out of the temple on the mountain and was leisurely walking with her friends, with the previous permission of her parents Vasudeo and Devaki, Arjuna lifted her, put her on the chariot and drove it towards Indraprastha. When Balarama came to know about it, he was greatly disturbed. All the Yadava elders had assembled in their Sudharma assembly hall to take decision in the matter. All the members were greatly agitated at the thought that Arjuna could dare to lift their prized object and insult them thus. Everybody including Balarama was in favour of a fight to the finish. But Krishna was calm and quiet. This infuriated Balarama who asked him to give his opinion. Krishna said, "You are all terribly upset. Balarama dada (my elder brother) is also disturbed. In this mental condition, none of you is in a position to think with equanimity and good conscience. I am one of you. Your good is my good. Calm your minds and think

dispassionately. Arjuna is handsome and brave. He is an unrivalled archer in Bharata. He also comes from a great family. He is the son of my great aunt Kunti devi.

"It is true that Arjuna has kidnapped her. He may have the feeling that we would not agree if he had sought our permission. Again Subhadra has also not resisted nor disliked his action. In my opinion, Subhadra has got the best man as her husband. It is, therefore, proper for us to call him back and celebrate their marriage with pomp and splendour."

This logical analysis of the situation captured the hearts of the members of the assembly. They approved the match and the marriage was celebrated with lavish display of wealth and joyousness. Arjuna stayed there for a year and after completion of the twelve years of pilgrimage, returned to Indraprastha. He rushed to the apartment of Draupadi and begged her pardon for his improper action. Draupadi was however reconciled to Subhadra when she came and saluted her with the words : "Didi I am your slave." After all she was the sister of her best well-wisher Krishna.

We began this brief outline of the life of Krishna, mentioning his primary role in the Bharata war. True to his word, in the great war, he himself did not take action in the fight. He acted as a charioteer of his friend Arjuna.

VI

WAR PREPARATIONS

When Krishna's mission to bring about reconciliation between the Pandavas and the Kauravas failed, war between these cousins became inevitable.

The war preparations then began at a hectic pace. The Kauravas and the Pandavas were first cousins and many of the Kings then were their close relations. These two contestants began wooing the different Kings, to join them with their armies.

Arjuna went to Dwaraka to enlist support of the Yadava army. Though it was well known that Krishna's sympathy lay with the Pandavas, Duryodhana had also sought his help and requested Krishna to join him against the Pandavas.

Caught in a fix Krishna told them both that he alone would join one party and his army the other one. Moreover, he himself would not wield any weapon. True to the character, Duryodhana chose his army and Arjuna chose Krishna who joined Pandavas as Arjuna's charioteer.

Duryodhana returned triumphant to Hastinapur boasting that foolish

Arjuna would have Krishna alone without any army, while he would have the whole army of Yadavas.

Shalya joins Duryodhana : Shalya was the King of Madradesha and the maternal uncle of the Pandavas. His sister Madri was married to the King Pandu. Dharmaraja sent an invitation to him to join. He collected a large army and started for Upaplavya, where the Pandavas had established their temporary capital.

Duryodhana came to know about it. He issued secret orders to his governors to extend lavish hospitality to Shalya and his army, wherever he would camp, while on way to Upaplavya. Shalya's army was very large. When it camped, it covered an area of about 15 sq.miles. Shalya was mightily pleased with the arrangements. He expressed to the attending officers his pleasure at the excellent arrangements made and wanted to reward them: He sent message to Dharmaraja to allow him do so. He had not the least idea that those arrangements were made by Duryodhana. When, therefore, Duryodhana went to see Shalya and thanked him for having accepted the Kaurava hospitality, he was stunned. He asked Duryodhana what reward did he expect of him. He straightaway requested Shalya to join him with his army.

Shalya had to pay the price for his carelessness. He should have made enquiries from officers as to who they were and how were his nephews doing? Even good men get into trouble thus for their negligence.

Shalya had to grant Duryodhana's request. For that was the custom then, whoever requested first for help, the Kshatriya had to grant that request. In this case, Shalya was coming at the request of the Pandavas. Yet he had to give his word to the Kauravas as they had asked him to do so.

Thus trapped by Duryodhana, he arrived at the Pandava camp and met Dharmaraja, and told him what had happened on the way. His sympathy lay with the Pandavas. He, therefore, asked Dharmaraja, "What can I do for you, under these circumstances?"

Dharmaraja ofcourse would not ask him to break the promise. Shalya was an expert charioteer second, if not equal, to Krishna. Duryodhana, he guessed would ask Shalya to be the charioteer of Karna when he fights with Arjuna. He, therefore, requested his uncle, to humiliate Karna as much as he could do for the insults he had heaped on Draupadi and thus make him lose his heart in the actual combat.

Karna was the only warrior the Pandavas feared most. By depriving him of his Kavach-Kundalas (protective armour) through Indra who had come in disguise as a Brahmana and had begged these of him,

they had won a great tactical victory over the Kauravas. The second act to make Karna to lose interest in the war was Krishna's disclosure to him that he was the son of Kunti. The third precaution was to obtain promise from Shalya to discourage Karna at the time of actual combat.

Indra loses through arrogance : Shalya assured Yudhishtira that he would achieve success and that difficulties and hardships were the part of the game of life. Then related the episode of how even Indra, the Lord of the heavens, had to suffer in the past. Dharmaraja along with his brothers and Draupadi had suffered much, and were bound to be rewarded for their courage and virtuous conduct. He then narrated how Indra had to suffer for his arrogance.

Because of the unlimited powers that Indra possessed, he had become very arrogant. One day while in his court in the heaven, Brihaspati his Guru, entered it. It was customary even for the Kings to pay homage to their Gurus by rising from their seat and offering a low bow. Indra puffed up with the pride as he was, did not rise from his seat. Brihaspati finding that he had shown deliberate disrespect to him left the assembly. With his departure, the court lost all its splendour. Brihaspati, the highly learned and respected figure, was the ornament of that heavenly court.

Indra realized his mistake and wanted to make up with him, but the teacher had disappeared from the heaven. With Brihaspati gone, the gods began losing strength. The Asuras were thus encouraged to attack the Devas who then adopted Trishirasa or Vishvarupa as their preceptor. Trishirasa was so called as he had three heads. Through one mouth he would recite the Vedas through the other he used to take sura or wine and through the third he used to keep watch on all the directions, so that nobody would approach him. He observed celibacy and was constantly engaged in severe austerities.

Indra became jealous of him lest he would take his place through penance. He asked the beautiful dancing girls to entice him and make him swerve from the path of celibacy. But he would not. He was Twashta's (divine carpenter's) son.

Indra one day killed him with his Vajra. Twashta enraged at this dastardly act, created Vritra the enemy of Indra. Vritra in his fights with Indra was gaining upper hand. The Devas were disturbed. At last through the aid Lord Vishnu Indra could kill Vritra.

The story is symbolic. Indra represents the Kshatriya power and Trishirasa the spiritual power. The harmony between the two is the aim of the righteous. Lord Vishnu helps in maintaining the ascendancy of Dharma

i.e. righteousness. Trishirasa could not be trusted to pay undivided attention to Governmental administration, for he was engaged in severe austerities and again he used to take Sura-wine. He was therefore required to be removed. In removing him Indra committed the sin of killing one who was wedded to the study of the Vedas. He thus committed the sin of killing a Brahmana. Though he was carpenter's son, yet he had become a Brahmana through penance and the study of the Vedas. So Indra had lost his power. The carpenter father produced another powerful son Vritra who also became a Brahmana. He was the enemy of Indra.

The Ideal was the fusion of the Kshatriya and Brahmana power and not enmity between them. So Indra was aided and abetted by the sages, the Brahmanas and the gods, to kill Vritra who acted against the Indra's interests in keeping his subjects happy. But again Indra committed the sin of killing a Brahmana, Vritra.

Because of this sin, Indra lost his power to rule over the heavens. In this predicament the gods approached Nahusha a powerful Kshatriya who also was the adherent of the Vedic ideal of the harmony between the spiritual and the temporal. Nahusha was thus elevated to the position of Indra.

This great power corrupted Nahusha soon. He asked Shachi the wife of former Indra to be his wife. This, that saintly Shachi could not tolerate. She went to the protection of the Guru Brihaspati.

Nahusha told the gods to fetch Shachi to him. He gave them the ultimatum that if they would not, he would harass them. They went to Brihaspati and requested him to send Shachi to Nahusha - the new Indra. Shachi begged Brahaspati not to do so. Brihaspati consoled her and asked her to bide her time. Shachi took a hint and boldly went to Nahusha's palace. She requested him to allow her to find out whether Indra was alive or dead; if he was dead she would marry him. Nahusha agreed.

Indra had reduced himself to an atom and was practising penance. Shachi was terribly distressed at her beloved's plight. Indra consoled her and told her to approach Nahusha and request him to come to her residence in a palanquin carried by the sages.

She went to Nahusha with that request. He was overjoyed. He said : "Oh, my beloved! you are true to your word. I shall abide by your suggestion."

Nahusha had lost his balance. He called the sages and bade them to carry the palanquin to Shachi's palace. He was in a great hurry. He goaded them to run faster. He was so blinded by lust that he

even kicked the revered sage Agastya after scolding him for his slow tread and urged him 'Sarpa sarpa - be fast, be fast'. It was too much for Agastya to bear. He cursed Nahusha by saying : "Oh thou meanest of the mean! be then sarpa" (sarpa means to move; its other meaning is serpent). Nahusha immediately fell down from the heavens into the jungles and became a python (a large serpent).

Shachidevi's travails were over. She was united to her husband Indra who was restored to his old position as the Lord of the heavens.

Shalya blessed Dharamaraja for his patience and steadfast adherence to Dharma. He told him: "Great ones have also to suffer and patience pays in the end."

Genealogy of the Pandavas : So far we have named so many famous personalities like Krishna, Bhishma, Drona etc. Let us trace their genealogy in brief.

Lord Krishna is from Yadava dynasty. Manu is stated to be the first king of this epoch. From him came his daughter Ela. The line can be shown thus :

Manu -

Ila—Pururavas—Ayu—Nahusha—Yayati. Yayati had five sons namely—Yadu, Turvasu, Anu, Druhyu, and Puru.

From Yadu came the Yadavas. In Rigveda, we have some of the Yadu dynasty kings noted. Amongst them is Vrijinivata. Vidarbha, Dasharha, Satvata, Andhaka, Vrishni are other names we come across, in the Puranas and Mahabharata. Krishna hails from this last named family and played a very important role in the political history of the Pandavas. In his days, he was regarded as an Avatara and continued to be so regarded even now.

From Yayati's son Puru, came the Paurava dynasty. Dushyant, Bharata, Hastin (founder of Hastinapura). Ajamidha, Kuru, Dilip, Pratip, Shantanu are the famous names from this line. Bhishma, Chitrangada, Vichitravirya were Shantanu's sons. Bhishma the eldest had renounced his claim to the throne of the Kurus. His father Shantanu was infatuated by the beauty of Satyavati (Matsyagandha) the daughter of the Chief of the fishermen. He wanted to marry her, but could not as he had already crowned Bhishma as the Yuvaraja - the heir apparent to his throne and the fishermen-chief had laid down the condition that his daughter's son should be the king of the Kurus, after Shantanu. When Bhishma came to know about it, he vowed to remain celibate and promised to offer kingship to Satyavati's son from Shantanu - his father.

Satyavati had another son before she was married to Shantanu. In

her maiden state, the sage Parashara happened to see her. He was captivated by her charms. She agreed to be with him, provided she would retain her maiden state, even after she got a son from him. Krishna - Dvaipayana Veda Vyasa - the most celebrated one was that son.

Bhishma was Shantanu's son from his earlier wife, Ganga. She had married him on the condition that he was not to be angry or displeased with her for whatever good or bad she would do, while she was with him. She was a very pious and virtuous lady of uncommon beauty. But as soon as a child was born to her, she would proceed straight to Ganga river and drown it. She did this foul deed seven times. When another son was born to her the eighth time, the king could not hold his own any longer. The child was saved. He was named Devavrata who later became famous as Bhishma, so named because of his fearsome and hard vow, not to marry or stake his claim to the thrown of Shantanu.

Ganga told her story : Eight Vasus, the immortals, one day happened to see Nandini, the cow of the great sage Vasishtha. They were captivated by the bewitching form of the cow. The wife of one of the Vasus wanted the cow to be taken to their abode. The Vasus argued : "What is the use of 'cow to us the immortals?" Yet the wife insisted and the cow was taken away, while the sage was not at his Ashrama. When Vasishtha returned, he missed the cow and her calf. Through his yogic powers, he came to know of the theft. He cursed the Vasus to be born as mortals. When the Vasus came to know of it, they returned the cow and the calf to Vasishtha. They begged for the withdrawal of the curse. This he could not do. However, he modified it to suit their convenience. They would be born to the river goddess Ganga who would marry Shantanu. She would throw off the seven newborn babes into the river and the eighth would be brought up by her. He would live long."

Chitrangada and Vichitravirya were born to Satyawati from Shantanu. Chitrangada was killed in battle. Bhishma had won three daughters of King of Kashi. Their names were Amba, Ambika and Ambalika. Bhishma wanted these three to be married to Vichitravirya.

The eldest Amba however told Bhishma that she had already preferred Shalva the King of Saubala country. But he along with the others had been defeated by Bhishma. Yet he sent her with escort to Shalva. But the latter refused to marry her as she had been won over by Bhishma. She then returned to Bhishma who tried to persuade his brother Vichitravirya to take her as his wife. He, however, refused to marry her on the ground that she had set her heart on the other. As Bhishma had vowed not to marry, he also refused.

Amba was then terribly upset. She felt that Bhishma was the cause of her misfortune. She vowed to cause death of Bhishma. She would kill Bhishma in her next life. Accordingly she was born as a daughter of the King Drupada. Finding that his daughter was thinking seriously to kill Bhishma, he exiled her for he was afraid of incurring the wrath of Bhishma. She again practised panance, changed her sex, and became the warrior Shikhandin.

In the Bharata war, Arjuna could kill Bhishma screened as he was by Shikhandin. Bhishma would not fight Shikhandin as he knew he was born as a female.

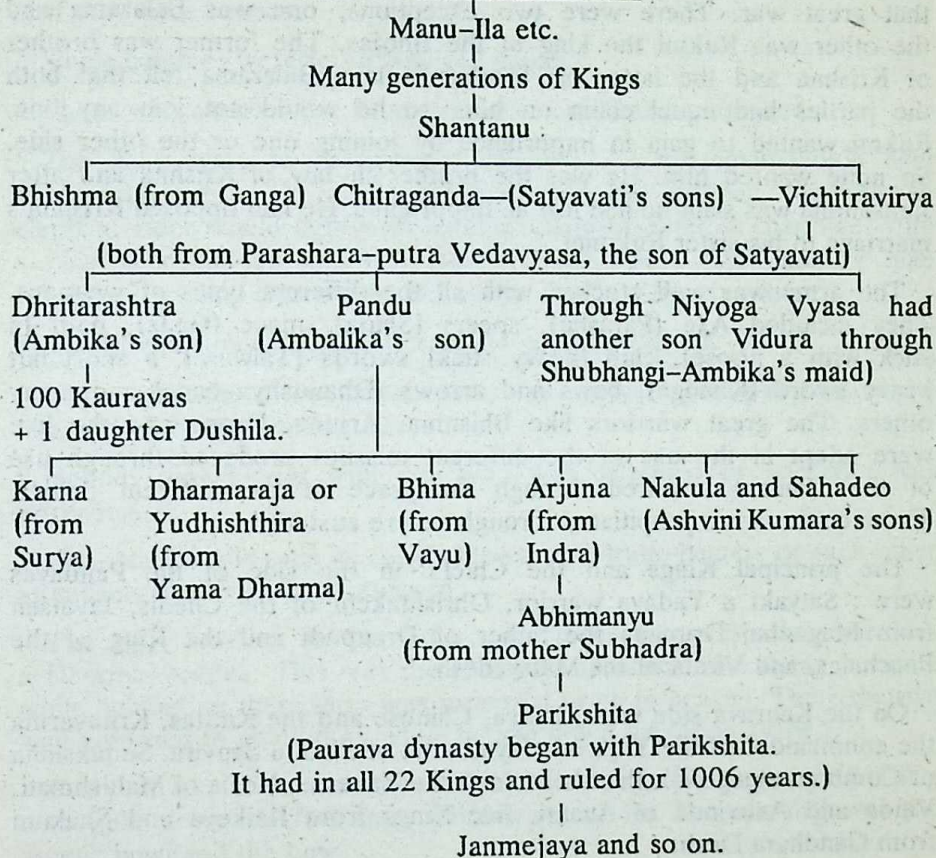
Vichitravirya indulged too much in sensual pleasures. He developed that fell disease, Tuberculosis, and died issue-less.

Satyavati was too much depressed at the realisation that there was no male issue to continue the Kuru line. She tried invain to persuade Bhishma to beget a son through Ambika, the eldest queen of Vichitravirya.

How the Kuru line was saved : In those days, it was considered proper for a member of the Royal family to beget a son even through a widow, to continue the family line. But Bhishma would not agree because of his rigid vow, not to marry or produce an issue.

Bhishma suggested a learned Brahmana would be a proper choice for the purpose. He quoted many such instances of the days of yore.

Satyavati liked the idea. She decided to call her son from the sage Parashara, and request him to do the needful. Bhagavan Vedavyasa came and prostrated before his mother and asked her the reason of remembering him. She acquainted him with her thoughts. He could not say 'no' as the purpose was just and proper. He had requested Satyavati to prepare for about a year the minds of the queens to receive him. But she was in a hurry. At the time of union, seeing the dark, uncouth ascetic figure of Vyasa, Ambika the eldest queen closed her eyes. Because of this she got Dhitarashtra the bornblind son. Satyavati then persuaded Vyasa to meet the second Queen Ambalika. But she also became pale at the time of the union with the sage. The son born was very pale-white in colour. Satyavati wanted yet another son from her elder daughter-in-law Ambika. She requested Vyasa to produce one more son through Ambika. Vyasa agreed. But Ambika played a trick. She did not want to meet Vyasa. Instead she sent her clever and beautiful maid Shubhangi. She very heartily embraced Vyasa. She got Vidura the virtuousness incarnate. Dhritarashtra's sons were called Kauravas and Pandu's sons were called Pandavas.

The family tree from manu

Dharmaraja, Bhima and Arjuna were from Kunti and the last two from Madri. These two were the queens of Pandu. As Pandu was nirbija—without seed, these five were born through Mantra power. The five Pandavas had five sons from Draupadi.

VII

BATTLE—LINES DRAWN

When efforts to bring about peace between the two sides finally broke down, with Duryodhana's declaration that the Pandava's would not get even needle-point territory without a fight, war became inevitable.

Pandavas collected seven divisions and eleven divisions were on the side of the Kauravas.

Each division had 21870 chariots — the armed cars, equal number of elephants, sort of tanks of the modern army, thrice as many cavalry soldiers and five times as many foot soldiers.

All the Kings, chiefs and nobles from the Bharata participated in that great war. There were two exceptions, one was Balarama and the other was Rukmi the king of the Bhojas. The former was brother of Krishna and the latter his brother-in-law. Balarama felt that both the parties had equal claim on him, so he would not join any one. Rukmi wanted to gain in importance by joining one or the other side. So none wanted him. He was the brother-in-law of Krishna and after Jarasandha was slain he had lost all importance. He had opposed Krishna's marriage to his sister Rukmini.

The army was well-stocked with all the different types of weapons. They included Axe (Parashu), spears (Shula), mace (Gada), patti (a stick with a noose), club (heavy stick) swords (Talwara), a short but heavy sword (Khadga), bows and arrows (Dhanushya-bana) and many others. The great warriors like Bhishma, Arjuna, Drona and the like were adept in the use of the different missiles produced through use of the Mantras acquired through the grace of the different deities. These deities were propitiated through severe austerities.

The principal Kings and the Chiefs on the side of the Pandavas were : Satyaki a Yadava warrior, Dhrishtaketu of the Chedis, Jayatsen from Magadha, Drupada the father of Draupadi and the King of the Panchalas, and Virata of the Matsyadesh.

On the Kaurava side were Shalya, Chinese and the Kiratas, Kritavarma the commander of the Yadavas. Jayadratha of Sindhu Sauvira. Sudakshina of Comboja along with the Shakas and the Yavanas, Neela of Mahishmati, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, five Kings from Kaikeya and Shakuni from Gandhara Desh.

Bhishma was appointed the commander-in-chief of the Kauravas. He told Duryodhana that he would lead the Kaurava army and fight well. As however he had no heart in that war, he would not kill the Pandavas who were his grandchildren, just as the Kauravas were. He also made it clear that as Karna in whom Duryodhana had implicit faith was not accepting his leadership, Duryodhana was free to appoint him as his Generalissimo. Upon this Karna decided not to join the war till Bhishma was the leader of the battle-field. In spite of this Bhishma was appointed the Chief of the Kaurava forces by Duryodhana. The field of battle chosen was Kurukshetra, the modern Panipata in Harayana State.

Drishtadyumna the son of Drupada was chosen as the Chief of the Pandava army. Both the commanders of the opposing armies came together and decided on the code of conduct during the war.

The conditions accepted were :-

1. The battle of the day should be fought during sunrise and sun-set. The hostilities would cease at the sun-set.

2. The combatants on both the sides would then mingle with each other as if they were friends.
3. Single combats were to be between equals.
4. Those who would retire from the field would not be attacked.
5. The fights were to be amongst equals i.e. a horseman would fight another horseman. He would not fight with the footman. Similarly an elephant-rider would fight with another elephant-rider, a charioteer with a charioteer and so on. The infantry man would fight infantry man from the opposing side. He would not be attacked by any other.
6. Those who would seek shelter would not be attacked.
7. If per chance, a combatant loses his weapon, he was not to be attacked till he got another one.
8. Nobody would fight with one who was disarmed or one who was retreating.
9. Non-combatants such as conch-blowers or drum-beaters or such other attendants were not to be attacked.

The fight was to be carried on by these rules. Bharata-war was a Dharma-yuddha. This was the Kshatriya Dharma. One dying in battle while fighting on these lines was supposed to go to heaven. The Kshatriya was supposed to meet glory while he laid down his life in battle.

Every divisional commander had his own flag. Bhishma had his flag with palm tree and five stars painted on it. On Drona's flag was the ascetic bowl and the bow.

Dharmaraja, finding that his army was smaller as compared to Duryodhanas, did not deploy his forces in a wider field. They were arranged in niddle formation.

Dharmaraja seeks benediction : While the battle lines were thus drawn and the combat was about to start, Dharmaraja put his weapons in the chariot, got down from it and started towards Bhishma's chariot on the opposite side. Arjuna and others were perplexed at their elder brother's action. They felt Dharmaraja might seek peace even at the last moment.

Krishna removed their doubts by stating : "Don't worry. He is only seeking blessings from the elders like BHISHMA, DRONA, SHALYA and others." Dharmaraja went to Bhishma and touched his feet and sought blessings from that grandsire. Bhishma's heart melted at this gesture of his virtuous grandson. He showered his benediction on him with the words : 'Be victorious'. This would sound surprising to the modern ear attuned to cunning and deceit in day-to-day ordinary

dealings. And here Dharmaraja was seeking benediction from the opposing general. The circumstances were strange. With no heart in the war, several lacs of soldiers had gathered on the battle-field. It was sheer obstinacy and wickedness of one man—Duryodhana, which had brought all of them in the battle-field. None from the Kaurava side had the courage to arrest Duryodhana and put him in jail for life, as Krishna had suggested in the open assembly.

Though Pandu was younger than Dhritarashtra, yet he was chosen as the King as Dhritarashtra was born blind. A blind man cannot rule effectively, and so Pandu was the legitimate heir to his father's throne. Pandu died prematurely and his sons were minor, so, during the minority of the eldest son Yudhishtira, Dhritarashtra got the crown. Later to avoid conflict between his son Duryodhana and the Pandavas, with the consent of Bhishma, Drona and Vidura, Dhritarashtra suggested to Dharmaraja that they should move to the Khandava-vana (forest by name Khandava) and found there a new city and carve out for them the new Kingdom there. Pandavas did it beyond imagination and also performed Rajasuya a very prestigious sacrifice. Yet by deceitful dice-play, the Pandavas were exiled to the forest. After their successful completion of the forest-stint, they had returned and were claiming their legitimate share of the Kingdom. Duryodhana was not prepared to offer them even a needle-point territory. So the Pandavas had no other go but to fight. Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and others were agreeable to this claim. They had therefore no heart in this war.

So when Dharmaraja sought blessings from Bhishma, Drona, Shalya and Kripacharya (the family priest), they showered benedictions on Dharmaraja with the words : "Be Victorious."

It should not however be supposed that this war under these peculiar circumstances was a shadow-war. It was fought very vigorously exhibiting unprecedented bravery on both sides.

When Dharmaraja returned to the chariot after seeking the benedictions of the four elders, Bhishma blew his conch as an indication that the war was about to start. All other commanders also blew their conches indicating their readiness also.

Gita born : And a strange thing happened!

Arjuna, the veteran of hundreds of successfully fought wars, asked his charioteer Krishna to take his chariot to the front to have a look at those assembled for this great event.

He came and saw. He lost all desire to fight and win the war. All those veterans assembled on the battle-field were aghast at that unheard of spectacle. A hero of hundreds of battles, coming on the battle-field with an irresistible desire to fight and win, should at the

nick of the moment develop cold feet, and declare : "Oh! I don't want to kill my kinsmen!" – A strange thing indeed!

Was it not a sight to see?

He said : "Oh Krishna! What good can accrue to a man by killing his own kith and kins? It is sin. I don't want this Kingdom. I don't want to fight."

He kept aside his bow and categorically told his charioteer Lord Krishna : "I won't fight. This is foolishness to fight with one's own kith and kin. Thousands of them would be killed in this war. This would bring no good to anybody. When the young men the flower of the country lose their lives, the women would go astray and the rhythm in the society would then be destroyed. All round unhappiness would be the result."

Krishna rebuked him by asking : "How such a blameworthy thought has assailed you at such a time? It is unbecoming of a Kshatriya. Rise, oh, Arjuna rise! And win a prosperous and unrivalled kingdom on earth and rule wisely like the gods in heaven!"

Such an exhortation could not move him. He persisted in saying "If all Kinsmen die, for whom am I to win such a Kingdom?"

Then Krishna explained in detail his duties as a Kshatriya. He told him : "A Kshatriya has to suppress the evil and support righteousness. If you do not perform your prescribed duties, the order in this world would be uprooted. The goondas will thrive, and the peaceful life of all human beings will be destroyed. Please remember, if you behave thus, all else will follow your path and there will then be chaos all around."

Then follows the greatest ever dialogue on philosophical, social and religious matters between the truth-seeker Arjuna and the Supreme Master, Lord Krishna. Step by step the master unfolds the supreme philosophical truth, that the creation, animate as well as inanimate, is nothing but His own manifestation. So all are held together by the bond of *Universal Brotherhood*. Nobody has therefore a right to grab what belongs to another. If somebody tries, it is the duty of the administrator-Kshatriya to restrain him from performing this unrighteous act. The teachers have to spread this truth amongst the masses. All have to come together to strive for the welfare of all.

These are the teachings of the Vedas and Krishna has explained these in his song-known as Lord's song-Bhagavadgita. Arjuna realises his mistake, gets up and promises to fight against the evil-doers.

Thus was born Gita – the Lord's song, the tallest and the most instructive literature of the world. By probing deep into the meanings of the words used in it, one can easily get the answers besetting one's own mind.

VIII

THE WAR BEGINS

Bhishma even at his age of about 150 years was causing terrible destruction on the battle-field. The air was thick with war cries, sound of conches and trumpets, neighing of horses and trumpeting of elephants. The soldiers were falling by thousands. It was a mad, mad war.

The highlight of the **first day's** battle was the unique display of bravery and skill by Abhimanyu, the youngest amongst the Kurus, and by Bhishma the eldest. Abhimanyu was the son of Arjuna and Subhadra, about eighteen years old. Charioteer of Durmukha one of the brothers of Duryodhana, was killed and many other war Veterans like Kritavarma, Shalya and Bhishma himself were hit by his arrows. The bow of Kripacharya was broken by him. Then Bhishma turned his attention towards him. Seeing this, Bhima, Virata and Dhrishtadyumna rushed to his aid. Abhimanyu then was relieved and he fought with others. Virata's son Sveta also fought valiantly but he was ultimately killed.

First day's battle was a victory for Bhishma and so Duryodhana returned to his camp with a triumphant air. Second day began with an address by Duryodhana to his soldiers. Flushed with victory on the first day, he assured the soldiers that the victory was theirs and so they should fight to the end.

Bhishma's onslaught, this day too, was terrific. He wrought havoc in the Pandava army. Thousands were felled. Seeing this carnage, Arjuna himself came to face the grandsire. Duryodhana exhorted his generals to protect Bhishma. But before Arjuna's quick and sure shafts, the others could hardly face Arjuna. He made short work of them. Then Duryodhana rushed to Bhishma and addressed him as Gangaputra – son of Ganga. He said how could that happen when Bhishma and Drona were on the field. He then spoke : "Karna is not fighting because of you. If you do not stop Arjuna, our entire army will be destroyed. Please do short work of Arjuna immediately."

Grandsire became furious. His arrows hit both Arjuna and Krishna.

Drona : In the other theatre of war the battle between Drona and his inveterate enemy Dhrishtadyumna was raging fiercely. Drona was the son of sage Bharadvaja. Drupada the son of Panchala King, was Drona's close friend at the Bharadvaja hermitage. After completion of education Drona married Kripa the sister of Kripacharya the priest of the Kauravas. Ashwathama was his son.

Drona had at Guru's ashrama learnt the art of wielding missiles under that great teacher Parashurama. Drona became a perfect master in military science under him. He had till then no means of livelihood. He went

to Drupada the King with the hope that he would treat him generously. But Drupada ill-treated him. He used sharp words : "What friendship can be there between a crowned king and a wandering beggar." This made a deepest wound in Drona's heart. He left his place with a vow to avenge the insult. (Also see p.178 earlier here.)

For his undoubted skill in archery and mastery over Mantrashastra, he was employed in Kuru palace as the teacher to the young Pandavas and Kauravas. As soon as their teaching was over, Drona sent Karna and Duryodhana to bring alive Drupada by capturing him. They could not. Arjuna was then sent. He could bring the King Drupada and his minister as captives. Seeing that Draupada was sufficiently humiliated Drona set him free.

Since then Draupada was nursing a deep hatred towards Drona. He practised penance and performed sacrifices. Through the grace of God Fire, he obtained Draupadi and Dhrishtadyumna who swore that he would kill Drona. Such a man was the Pandavas' Senapati (commander-in-chief).

In the battle between him and Drona on the *second day*, Dhrishtadyumna suffered very badly. But in good time Bhima intervened and carried Dhrishtadyumna to the other side. Duryodhana sent the Kalinga army against Bhima. But Bhima killed great number of Kalinga warriors. Then Bhishma came to Kalinga's help. Seeing this Satyaki, Abhimanyu and other warriors came to protect Bhima. Bhishma's chariot and its horses were brought down by Satyaki. It was however sun-set time and the battle was stopped for the day.

In our Volume I, we have shown that the battle was fought every alternate day. The other day was for the rest and for the clearance of the debris of the dead bodies of soldiers and animals and the other war material destroyed during the day of the war.

On the third day, Bhima and his son Ghatotkacha (born of rakshasa woman named Hidimbā) played havoc on Duryodhana's division of the army. Duryodhana was himself hit and he lay in swoon in his chariot. His charioteer quickly drove him away from the field.

When he regained consciousness he came to Bhishma and said : "How could this happen when you are around? You should have told me that you love the Pandavas and Satyaki and Dhrishtadyumna are your friends."

Bhishma smiled and said : "I had told you in the beginning that I love Pandavas and their claim is just. I had advised you not to wage this war. Still I am doing my best despite of my old age."

So saying Bhishma rallied his forces again and made a concerted attack on the Pandava army. Arjuna had no mind to kill his grand

father who had loved him so much. He was therefore in no mood to face Bhishma defiantly. Krishna sensed danger. He rebuked Arjuna for his softness towards Bhishma who was engaged in mad carnage of Pandava army. He stepped down from the chariot dropping the reins. He rushed towards Bhishma with his discus.

Bhishma was not at all perturbed. He said : "Come, Madhava come! I love you. I bow to you. Please take my life. It will be a boon to me." Bhishma had known his weaknesses. He had taken a terrific vow and would not break it at any cost. He knew Pandavas' cause was just. Yet he was fighting against them. Why? Because he had eaten Dhritarashtra's salt and was therefore bound to him. Did not the Kingdom legitimately belong to him? Or, once he had renounced his claim to it, had he become a servant of the King? This was a false doctrine that he was propounding. He said : "अर्यस्य पुरुषो दासः - *arthasya purusho dasah* - man is slave to अर्थ - to wealth." He considered himself to be the servant of the Kaurava king Dhritarashtra and therefore a slave to him. He was old, he could as well as have argued : "I am an old man. I cannot and I do not want to fight. Moreover, this is an unjust war. I don't want to fight." With him Drona would also have declined to join Duryodhana. With all his good qualities, he was a slave to certain of his mental predilections. This way, he along with Drona is primarily responsible for that unjust war. Without them Duryodhana would not have dared to declare the war against the Pandavas.

Seeing this desparate act of Krishna, Arjuna rushed forward, over-took him and entreated him to return. He reminded him of his vow not to fight in that war. He was then pacified. Arjuna then resumed his operations more furiously than ever. The third day went to favour of the Pandavas.

Bhishma's strategy of arraying his army in eagle formation as against Pandavas' reply to it, by arranging their army in crescent formation, did not prove to be of any avail.

The fourth day's battles were as fierce as the earlier ones. On that day many of Duryodhana's brothers were killed. This news brought terrible grief to Dhritarashtra who was listening to an eye-witness account from Sanjaya his close associate. Sanjaya had the power to see the battle-field operations from his seat near Dhritarashtra who too was sitting on his coach in the palace. He angrily spoke to Sanjaya "What! you bring only bad news to me." Sanjaya replied : 'Can I manufacture the news, Sir?'

"Bhima is going to kill all my sons" shouted Dhritarashtra. "What are Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Ashwathyama doing? When are they going to bring glory to Duryodhana?" He exclaimed.

"You did not listen to the sane advice of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Ashwathyama and my father. Now you have to suffer, oh King, calm yourself!"

That same night, Duryodhana went to the tent of Bhishma and asked him the cause or their defeat. He asked the same question to Guru Drona. They both replied that his cause was unjust. Again Krishna and Arjuna were more than a match for all of them. They advised him that still there was time and that he should make peace with the Pandavas. "Together," they told him, "You would conquer the whole world." **Fifth day** also saw terrific slaughter of men and destruction of animals and other materials. On Pandavas' side Satyaki's ten sons were killed by Bhurishrava's well-aimed darts. Bhurishrava a Yadava warrior was Satyaki's rival. He killed Satyaki's sons and thereby made Satyaki to nurse a grudge against him.

On the **sixth day**, Bhima had left the chariot and entered the enemy ranks with mace. He wrought havoc with it. But he was soon surrounded by enemy forces. Dhrishtadyumna rushed in time to save him. Abhimanyu also came on the scene of battle. They could all return safely to the camp. That day Drona caused prodigious slaughter of Pandava army. In the thick of battle, the strict rules of war were broken and there was indiscriminate and promiscuous slaughter.

The **seventh day** of war dawned with several fierce battles fought between well matched contestants at different sectors. That day Bhishma had arrayed the whole army in Chakra-circular formation. Like every day this day also saw many dead.

At the end of every day, soft music was played to soothen the ruffled feelings of both these armies. Thus they had day's good rest.

On the **eighth day**, Bhishma had arrayed his army in tortoise formation. In reply, the Pandavas, army was arranged in Trishula-three prouged formation.

On this day, Iravan the son of Arjuna from his Naga wife by name Ulupi had met his death at the hands of Alambasa a rakashasa chief. On hearing this, Arjuna was upset. He again told Krishna that war was a terrible disaster and it does no one good, the victor as well as the vanquished. He, however, vowed to fight till end. Duryodhana's eight more brothers were also killed.

Ghatotkacha, the son of Hidimbā from Bhima, made a terrible war cry and pounced on Kaurava army. Bhima had himself to run to his aid for his safety.

Duryodhana again met his grandfather that night and urged him to fight to the finish. Bhishma told him that he would not kill any of the Pandavas with his own hands, nor would he fight against Shikhandin.

Barring these two things, he was doing every thing within his power against the Pandavas. He advised him to take courage and fight as a Kshatriya, whatever the end.

On the *ninth day* the grandsire fought very fiercely. Many soldiers on Pandavas' side fell. Arjuna had no mind to kill his grand-father with his own hands. Seeing that Arjuna had no heart in the fight against Bhishma, Krishna again got down from the chariot, took up his discus and rushed towards Bhishma to kill him. Bhishma considered Krishna to be the Lord of the universe and so wanted to be slain by him. Arjuna again rushed towards him and persuaded him to return to the chariot, reminding him of his vow not to fight.

We see these three leaders in that war having three war-aims. Duryodhana wanted to win for his purely selfish ends. Arjuna had to fight for Duryodhana's obstinacy, and yet he wanted to save his kith and kin. Krishna wanted the Pandavas to win so that justice was done to them and the evil in the form of Duryodhana was suppressed.

Bhishma had lost his will to live. Krishna to whom he had taken as living god was twice on the battle field ready to kill him even at the point of breaking his vow not to fight in the war.

With these changed moods the *tenth day* battle began. Krishna had persuaded Arjuna to take Shikhandin in his chariot and send shafts at Bhishma from behind. When Shikhandin aimed arrows at Bhishma as the target, Bhishma kept his cool for he did not want to fight with a woman as Shikhandin was born as one. But when they hit him and pierced his flesh, he began spitting fire. Soon he calmed down. He saw that his end was near. Shikhandin without any qualms of conscience began issuing darts at the standing figure of the grandsire – the eldest and the finest of the Kurus. For it was Shikhandin's vow to kill Bhishma. Arjuna also bowing to the inevitable steeled his heart and aimed his arrows at the weak points in great warrior's armour. He did strike Arjuna with his javelin, but it had no effect on Arjuna. With the will to live lost, Bhishma fell down on the ground without touching it, as the arrows sticking in his body, held it aloft.

That day's battle was over. All assembled around him. Arjuna and all the Pandavas came and touched his feet. All Kauravas also came and fell at his feet. His head was hanging as it had no support. He asked for support. The warriors rushed to bring cushions. This old sire rejected them. Then he turned to Arjuna and asked of him a befitting support for his head. He took three arrows out from his quiver and arranged them under his head. He was feeling thirsty. Arjuna sent a shaft down into the earth near the head of Bhishma, and water gushed out of the hole and fell into his mouth. Ganga herself came to quench the thirst of her son.

He then called Duryodhana by his side and advised him to make peace with the Pandavas. He then told them to retire. He said he would lie on this bed of arrows till the sun turned on his north-ward (*Uttarāyan*) journey. On the day he fell, the sun was still on his southward course. It has been the belief amongst the Hindus that death in *Uttarāyana* is auspicious.

What a warrior! What a battle! Who was the victor? Who was the vanquished? Can you trace such an end to warrior's career elsewhere in the annals of the literature of the whole world? It has rightly been said that Hindustan and its psyche are the product of the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Karna's visit to Bhishma : When Karna heard of the fall of the grand old man, he rushed to the bed of arrows on which that mighty warrior was lying awaiting his end. He touched his feet and announced himself as 'Radha's son.' Bhishma looked up and passed his hand softly on his head and said : "You are not Radha's son. You are Kunti devi's son. Son of Surya! I have no hatred for you. I only grieved at your hatred of the Pandavas when they had given no cause for it. I know you are brave. I admire your valour, your generosity. You should now befriend the Pandavas." Karna said : "I know what I am. But I have eaten Duryodhana's salt. How can I now join the Pandavas?" "Do thou as you wish." Bhishma said and blessed him. As far as Karna was concerned, he was rightly under Duryodhana's obligations. When he was known as charioteer's son - *Sutaputra*, Duryodhana made him the King of the Angas. Late in his career he had become aware that he was Kuntiputra and not Sutputra. Even at that stage, had Karna joined the Pandavas he would have become the King Emperor instead of Dharmaraja. But he remained true to his commitments.

Dronacharya assumes command : After the departure of Bhishma, Dronacharya was anointed as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army. Though old, more than 100 years of age, he was very brisk in his movements. A word went round the Kaurava army, that 'as Bhishma had vowed not to kill the Pandavas, he had no heart in the war. Now with Karna's entry in the actual theatre of war, Duryodhana's victory was certain'. Karna's entry proved a moral-booster for the Kaurava army.

Dronacharya was also reluctant to slay any of the Pandavas. Sensing this mood of the Acharya, Duryodhana and Dushasana the members of the war council of the Kauravas decided upon a plan. They requested Drona to arrest Dharmaraja alive and hand him over to them. Drona agreed. His thinking was : "Dharmaraja is a pious man. As soon as he is captured, Duryodhana will make peace with him and hand him over half of the Kingdom. He will have also the satisfaction of having

won the war."

With this aim in view, when the Acharya gave him his word, Duryodhana gave vent to his plan. His plan was : "If Dharmaraja is slain in the war Duryodhana's dream of becoming the king would not come true. For then the Pandavas with redoubled energy will continue the fight. Even if all the Pandavas are slain, Krishna would either put Kuntidevi or Draupadi on the throne and would deprive Duryodhana of his dream of becoming a King."

Acharya was sorely disappointed at this disclosure of Duryodhana's plan. But what could he do? He had given the word. The news that Acharya had promised to capture Dharmaraja alive reached the Pandava's camp, through spies.

On the *eleventh day* the war was resumed; many battles raged fiercely in the different sectors of the war. Bhima defeated Shalya who retired from the field. The Kaurava army lost courage. At that critical time Drona appeared on the scene and encouraged his warriors to continue to fight as vigorously as before. And finding that Yudhishtira was weakly defended, the Acharya came swiftly near his chariot and cut his bow. Everybody around felt that Yudhishtira had been taken prisoner. Just then Arjuna came on the scene and stopped the Acharya from securing the person of Yudhishtira. The Acharya had to retreat.

The Acharya saw that so long as Arjuna was around, Dharmaraja, could not be captured. He therefore asked Duryodhana to take Arjuna away from the field and then he would execute his plan of capturing Yudhishtira alive.

With the Acharya's entry as the Generalissimo, the character of the strategy had taken a dramatic turn. The Trigartas formed a suicide squad (took a *samsaptaka oath*) and challenged Arjuna to a combat. Arjuna could not say, 'no'. Prince Satyajita of the Panchalas was kept to defend Dharmaraja.

So on the *twelfth day* of the battle, Arjuna had gone to fight the Trigartas. As they had taken an oath - do or die, they could not be easily subdued.

In another sector where Drona was trying to capture Yudhishtira, tough fight was given to him by the Pandava warriors. But Drona was cutting down whoever came in his way. Duryodhana was witnessing this grim battle with awe and admiration. He told Karna who was nearby that Drona was more than a match for the Pandava warriors. Drona was about to capture Yudhishtira. Karna cautioned against undue optimism and advised him to proceed to support the Acharya. He recounted how the Pandavas had succeeded against his attempts to poison them, burn them, humiliate them and detect them in their thirteenth

year of forest life. They both then proceeded to assist Drona.

Duryodhana then led an elephant division against Bhima. But Bhima sent crescent shaped arrows at Duryodhana and cut down his bow. Anga King rushed in aid of Duryodhana, but after a short fight he was killed. The Kaurava forces were scattered and trampled under the feet of the elephants and the horses fleeing in wild panic.

Then came the King Bhagadatta of Pragjyotisha (Assama) in aid of the Kaurava army. He mounted on his famous elephant *Supratika* and charged against Bhima. In an instant Bhima's chariot was broken into pieces and Bhima got down from it and saved himself. Bhima knew the art of subduing the elephant by attacking its vital organs. He got under it. The elephant in panic seized him. But he extricated himself from its hold and attacked it from below. When Bhima was not seen in his chariot or on the ground fighting Bhagadatta, the Pandava soldiers concluded that Bhima was slain and they were thus seized with panic. When Yudhishtira heard these cries, he directed the King of Dasharna Satyaki to attack Bhagadatta. Dasharna's elephant charged *Supratika*. In the tussle between these two elephants Dasharna's elephant died. but Bhima could release himself from the clutches of *Supratika* and ran out safe. Seeing Bhima safe and alive, there was jubilation in the Pandava army.

Bhagadatta on the back of *Supratika* appeared invincible. He charged against Satyaki whose chariot was broken. That elephant then caused great havoc in the Pandava army. Many soldiers were killed. Bhima again came in another chariot. Bhima's charioteer could not control the horses which ran out of the thick of the battle.

Arjuna who was fighting that suicide squad of the Trigartas rushed back to help Bhima and Satyaki. Susharma of the Trigart attacked him from behind. But Arjuna could drive him back in no time. He came to fight Bhagadatta seated on his fierce looking elephant *Supratika*. The Pandava's position improved and they made a concerted attack on Bhagadatta and his elephant. They could not stand the Pandava attack. Bhagadatta was a very old man of unimpeachable character. He made a last attempt by hurling the elephant goad with a Vaishnava Mantra at Arjuna. It could have killed Arjuna but Krishna in time stopped it and made it ineffective. Then Arjuna sent the volley of his arrows at the elephant and Bhagadatta. They both fell down. Arjuna was sorry for the death of both. But he could not help it.

Shakuni's brothers Vrisha and Achala then attacked Arjuna who could easily wear them down and killed them. Then Shakuni came but he had to leave the battle-field as he could not bear Arjuna's attacks. Shakuni was adept in using magic missiles. But Arjuna made them useless.

On the *thirteenth day* morning Duryodhana went to Drona and accused him of his complicity with the Pandavas, in not capturing Dharmaraja when he was so near him. Drona was hurt at this accusation. He told him that with Arjuna by the side of Yudhishtira, it was not possible to capture him. Efforts would have to be made to take Arjuna away from Dharmaraja.

On this day too that suicide squad again challenged Arjuna to a fight. He had to go away from the main battlefield. Drona then arrayed his army in a lotus formation. As Arjuna was away, Dharmaraja and Bhima persuaded Abhimanyu to break this formation and make a breach in it. Abhimanyu had learnt the art of breaking it, but had not the skill to come out of it, when surrounded. Bhima promised to follow him and do the rest.

They all started and attacked that formation. Before Drona's very eyes this young lad of about eighteen made a breach and entered. Before other Pandava warriors could come to his aid, King Jayadratha of Sindhu-Sauvira could close the breach and encircle Abhimanyu.

Abhimanyu fearless as he was attacked the Kaurava army fiercely and many warriors fell in the battle. Seeing this destruction Duryodhana himself rushed to the scene of fighting. Seeing this, Drona, to protect his King, sent veteran warriors. But Abhimanyu was undaunted, He wrought havoc on the Kaurava army. In such a situation, even Drona and Karna joined others and attacked Abhimanyu who was unaided by the veterans on the Pandava side. This was an unequal battle and so was against the rules.

Seeing the valour of this youth, Drona was moved to tears and exclaimed : "What a valorous boy this Abhimanyu is? He is without peer." Kripacharya who was near, nodded in agreement. Duryodhana who had heard this remark scolded Drona and said : "Acharya is partial to Arjuna. So he does not want to kill Abhimanyu."

Duhshasana heard this remark of his brother and rushed forward to kill Abhimanyu. But in the fight that raged between them for long, Abhimanyu's dart made Duhshasana unconscious. His charioteer led the chariot away from the battlefield.

Then Karna rushed at the son of his enemy Arjuna. He had vowed to kill Arjuna out of jealousy. Underterred by this veteran's presence, Abhimanyu sent the shower of his arrows against Karna. One of his arrows cut the bow of Karna who had to run away from the field.

The Pandavas, Yudhishtira, Bhima and others were trying to force their way into the Kaurava lines and rush to the aid of Abhimanyu. But Jayadratha with his vast army blocked their way.

Abhimanyu was attacked by Lakshmana the son of Duryodhana. But Lakshmana, brave though he was, could not stand Abhimanyu's attack and fell down dead.

At this Duryodhana became furious. Drona, Karna, Kripa, Ashwathyama and others closed upon Abhimanyu. Drona asked Karna to dislodge him from his chariot and then attack him from all sides. Karna succeeded in doing that and Abhimanyu had to get down and with sword in hand he faced the attackers. Drona with his arrow broke Abhimanyu's sword. Karna broke his shield. And the helpless and undaunted boy took up the wheel of his chariot and began whirling it as a discus, and attacking his adversaries. They greatly outnumbered him. His wheel was shattered to pieces. He fell down. Then Duhshasana's son came with his mace and killed him.

Sanjaya who was narrating the incidents taking place on the field of battle to Dhritrashtra, told the blind man : "Your partisans exulting over this foul deed like savage hunters danced with joy."

Yuyutsu the young son of Dhritrashtra got terribly angry with this ignoble display of savagery and shouted : "You have forgotten the code and killed this brave lad when he was without arms. Your ruin is imminent." With these words he left in disgust.

Yudhishtira, along with Bhima and others, was plunged in deep sorrow. His brother Arjuna and Krishna who were away engaged in the battle with the suicide squad returned triumphantly. When they heard of the death of Abhimanyu, their grief knew no bounds. Abhimanyu was the son of Arjuna and the nephew of Krishna. He was Subhadra's son. The Pandavas lost a great hero.

Krishna, however, consoled Arjuna and others. He said : "Do not give way to grief. Death is the companion of the Kshatriyas. Stop this lament and infuse courage into the others." When Arjuna heard the full story, he vowed to send Jayadratha to the abode of Death, before sun-set the next day. He further added that if he would not fulfil the vow he would himself court death.

It would be seen 'vow' the oath, the pledged word, played a great part in that society. In fulfilling the vow even certain well-laid-down rules also could be broken. These vows made certain actions imperative. To stick to one's word, regardless of any consequences was considered a great virtue then. These vows were taken in weak moment and yet herculean efforts were made to fulfil them. The whole of Ramayana was a saga of vow-fulfilment.

Jayadratha was the son of Vriddhakshatra the famous king of the Sindhudesha. When Jagadratha was born, there was a prediction that he would die in battle. Thereupon Vriddhakshatra uttered a curse that

he who would cause his son's head to roll down on the ground, would have his head shattered into fragments instantly.

Jayadratha was married to Duhshala the sister of Duryodhana. When Jayadratha heard of Arjuna's terrible vow, he expressed his desire to Duryodhana to return to his country. He was assured by Duryodhana that he need have no worry as there would be Karna, his brothers and all his army between him and the danger. He then approached Drona and requested him to so arrange the army that Arjuna would not be able to kill Jayadratha before sunset the next day.

On the *fourteenth day*, Drona so arranged the army that Jayadratha was placed 12 miles behind the front line. If Arjuna was to reach Jayadratha, he would have to annihilate the whole of the Kaurava army – an impossible task indeed!

Drona that day had arranged the main army in circular formation, followed by the lotus formation and was supported by the spike-headed force.

Durmarshana, brother of Duryodhana, moved forward and challenged Arjuna to a fight. But soon he was beaten. Then Duhshasana came along, but he was also beaten. The Kaurava army fled in all directions. Duhshasana went back to join Drona's forces. Arjuna swiftly proceeded forward. He came across Drona. He made a low bow and requested him to give him blessings to avenge the death of his son.

Drona stopped him and told him that he was his enemy. He must defeat him first before he proceeded further. They showered arrows on each other. Arjuna saw that Drona could not be defeated on the battlefield. He told him that he was his Guru and sped fast, bypassing him.

On the way he defeated Bhoja, Kritavarma and Sudakshina.

Shrutayudha stopped him. In the battle with Arjuna, he lost his horses. Then he hurled his mace at Krishna, but strangely the mace returned and struck Shrutayudha dead.

Parnasha was his mother. She practised penance that pleased Varuna. The Lord Varuna appeared before her. She wanted the boon that his son be not killed by any enemy. The Lord gave her the mace with the condition that it should not be used against one who was himself not engaged in fight. In this particular case, he had hurled the mace against Krishna with the intention to demobilise Arjuna. Krishna was not engaged in fight against him. So the weapon boomeranged and killed him.

The King of Kamboja then blocked his way. Arjuna defeated him and killed him and others, who were opposed to him. He then defeated many others and made his way to Jayadratha.

Dhritarashtra in his palace was listening to all that was happening on the battlefield. When Sanjaya, his friend and narrator, told him that Arjuna had reached that far-off place where Jayadratha was being protected by great warriors like Karna and others, he gave vent to his grief and said : "Oh Sanjaya! I had asked my son Duryodhana to be just to the Pandavas, but he would not listen." Sanjaya said : "Oh King! these laments are of no use now. You should have stopped Dharmaraja from playing that game of dice. Later on when Keshava (Krishna) came on a peace mission, you spurned his offer. Everyone now knows that your outward rectitude was a cloak for your hypocrisy."

Dhritarashtra shed tears profusely and asked Sanjaya to describe him the events thereafter.

When Duryodhana saw that Arjuna had triumphantly come to the place, where Jayadratha was, so speedily, he approached Drona and complained to him bitterly : "You openly are favouring Pandavas, otherwise how Arjuna got past you?" Drona chided him for his thoughtless and unbecoming remarks and said, "You do not understand. Arjuna is now away from Dharmaraja. This is the opportunity to capture him. I cannot leave this chance. Have this armour, cover yourself with it, and go yourself to protect your brother-in-law. Be Victorious."

Krishna finding that his horses had got a little tired, wanted to unyoke them. When Vinda and Anuvinda brothers attacked Arjuna, both of them were soon killed. Then Krishna unyoked his horses. The horses as if to thank Krishna gave out a pleasing neigh and rolled themselves on the ground happily. A little refreshed they were again yoked. Arjuna and Krishna proceeded further.

Then there was Duryodhana following them. They halted to give him a battle. The combat was fierce. They both were surprised to find that Arjuna's arrows would not hurt Duryodhana.

Arjuna then realised that Drona had accoutred him in some magic armour. Drona had taught him the whole art of using it. Duryodhana had come without thoroughly studying its use. Arjuna then killed his horses, his charioteer and destroyed the chariot. Duryodhana had to get down. He was then pierced by the needle-point arrows at such parts of his body, which were not covered by the armour. The pain was unbearable. Duryodhana had to flee.

They then arrived within striking distance of the armies of the opponents. Krishna and Arjuna then blew their conches. Karna, Kripa and Ashwathama who were guarding Jayadratha were surprised at the presence of Arjuna and Krishna, so early. When Duryodhana proceeded to protect Jayadratha, at the behest of Drona, the Pandavas giving fight at the main front could see that Drona was bent on capturing Dharmaraja. Dhrishtadyumna,

therefore, began harassing Drona. When Satyaki the Yadava hero sensed that Drona had sent an arrow which would have sucked the life out of the son of Drupada, he sent his shafts and cut Drona's arrow in the middle.

Drona then turned his attention to Satyaki. Drona soon found that Satyaki was the warrior of the class of Bhishma, Arjuna, Shri Rama and Kartavirya. When Drona's arrows of whatever deadly quality would not affect Satyaki, he sent the fire missile. Satyaki countered it by Varuna missile. But Satyaki soon began to show signs of fatigue. Dharmaraja then asked the Pandava warriors to make a concerted attack on Drona. Satyaki was somehow saved.

Dharmaraja then heard the sound of Krishna's conch but not the twang of Arjuna's bow. He felt apprehensive of Arjuna's life. He asked Satyaki to go to Arjuna's help. But Satyaki was very much concerned about Dharmaraja's safety. He, therefore, requested him to reconsider his decision. Thereupon, Dharmaraja told him : "Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna and others will do that job admirably. Your presence is very much necessary by Arjuna's side. Please go." Satyaki went.

Again the sound of Krishna's conch was heard, but not that of Arjuna's bow. Dharmaraja was again perturbed. He asked Bhima also to go. While Bhima was rushing to the aid of Arjuna, Drona stopped Bhima stating that he would not allow him to go unless he defeated him. Bhima with his mace broke the chariot of Drona who took another. That one was also broken. This way Bhima broke 8 chariots of Drona that day. Along with the chariots the whole army of the Bhojas was destroyed. He proceeded further mowing down Kaurava army on the way.

He reached that theatre of war, where Jayadratha was being protected by the Kaurava veterans like Karna, Kripa and others.

Bhima sighted Arjuna and Krishna giving a fight to the Kaurava army. Seeing them hale and hearty, he gave a roar like a lion. Dharmaraja heard it, he showered blessings on Arjuna and felt sure that Jayadratha would now be slain.

He felt that with Jayadratha's death good sense will prevail on Duryodhana, then he would sue for peace. Dharmaraja was still hoping against hope and expected that Satan Duryodhana to conclude peace with him.

While Bhima was proceeding further in the direction of Arjuna, Karna stopped him. A great fight ensued. Bhima was not eager to fight with him. He wanted to rush to where Arjuna was. Karna stopped him and with his accurate shafts Bhima received wounds all over the body. Then Bhima broke his chariot with the mace. Karna took another. This happened again and again. Seeing his plight, Duryodhana sent

his brother Durjaya to his help. But Durjaya was soon killed by Bhima. When again Karna's chariot was broken by Bhima, Duryodhana's another brother Durmukha came to his help. Karna climbed up to take his seat in Durmukha's chariot. But soon Durmukha was killed.

When Sanjaya narrated to Dhritarashtra the death of the two of his valiant sons at the hands of Bhima, Dhritarashtra blamed Duryodhana for boastfully admiring the courage and valour of Karna. Sanjaya there upon admonished Dhritarashtra for his short-sightedness and said : "Blame yourself, Oh, King! Do not blame Karna and others who are laying down their lives for you."

On that day 19 more sons of Dhitarashtra thus died at the hands of Bhima. Vikarna the virtuous one, was amongst them. Bhima was very much pained at this. Karna became furious. Bhima was wounded all over. Krishna saw Bhima's plight, and asked Arjuna to save his brother. Karna had promised Kunti not to kill any Pandava except Arjuna. So he did not want to kill Bhima. When, therefore, Arjuna discharged his arrows on Karna, he turned his attention to Arjuna.

Satyaki, who was sent by Dharmaraja to protect Arjuna, was engaged on way by Bhurishravasa, another Yadava warrior.

Bhurishravasa was the son of Somadatta and Satyaki was the grandson of Sini. Both belonged to the Yadava family. When Krishna's mother Devaki was a maiden, Somadatta and Sini had competed for her hand. In that feud Sini had won and had carried her way, on behalf of Vasudeo. Since then these two families were on inimical terms.

In the Bharata-war they found themselves on the opposite sides and so when Bhurishravasa noticed Satyaki, he challenged him to a battle.

They both fought very valiantly; when their chariots were broken, they fought with swords. When these were also broken, they locked themselves in deadly embrace. Krishna noticed it. He told Arjuna that Satyaki had come to his help after he was exhausted in battle with Drona. It was, therefore, necessary to rush to help Satyaki out of his predicament. Bhurishravasa had lifted Satyaki high up in the air and dashed him to ground. Everybody felt that Satyaki was dead. He was however still breathing. Then Bhurishravasa put one foot over his chest and lifted his hand with the sword to cut him into two. At this moment Arjuna sent one of his unfailing shafts and cut the uplifted hand of Bhurishravasa.

Bhurishravasa in amazement saw the author of this act. He accused Arjuna of unrighteous act in sending an arrow at a man not engaged in combat with him. He squarely blamed Krishna for inciting Arjuna to do this foul act.

Arjuna told him that Satyaki was coming to help him after he was exhausted in battle with Drona. His fight with him was an unequal one. Moreover Arjuna said : "Your act of placing your foot on his chest and trying to kill him when he was exhausted was not according to Dharma."

Bhurisharvasa then sat in meditation on the battle field on the seat of arrows. It was a strange sight to see. Arjuna praised him for his liberal nature in extending help to all those who deserved it.

In the meanwhile Satyaki regained consciousness, took up the sword lying there, dashed to the place, where Bhurishravasa was sitting in meditation and beheaded him. All this he did so suddenly that nobody, not even Arjuna and Krishna, could prevent his ghastly deed. Satyaki defended his act on the ground that Bhurishravasa had attempted to kill him in his helpless condition. However, nobody approved of this act. When passions run high man loses his balance.

Arjuna was concentrating all his energy in fulfilling his vow. Duryodhana hoped that Arjuna would not be able to fulfil his vow. He told Karna that his stars were in the ascendant and that he would be crowned with success. He asked him to put in his best. Karna was exhausted in his battle with Bhima. Still he assured his friend that he would do all what was in his power to do.

Krishna then blew his conch giving out a note like that of a donkey. This was a signal to his charioteer, Daruka to arrive there with his chariot. He came. Krishna asked Satyaki to take his seat in it and engage Karna while Arjuna concentrated on Jayadratha.

Satyaki and Karna were both exhibiting all their skill in archery. Sanjaya told Dhritarashtra that there were then only three great archers and they were Krishna, Partha (Arjuna) and Satyaki and there was no fourth to match them.

Soon Arjuna broke the Kaurava lines and reached the place where Jayadratha was standing in his chariot. Arjuna was a savyasachin i.e. able to use his bow with both of his hands.

Jayadratha was being defended by Karna, Kripa, Ashwathyama and Duryodhana and others. Jayadratha was also a great fighter. The battle between them raged for long. It appeared that the sun was sinking towards the horizon and still the battle was going on. Everybody felt that all was over for Arjuna. Then there was sudden darkness. A cry went out in both the camps. "The Sun has set. Arjuna has lost." Jayadratha felt elated and Duryodhana was in great glee. At that time when Jayadratha was off his guard, Arjuna sent his shaft which cut off Jayadratha's head. The Sun was then seen on the horizon. It had not set. Krishna then advised him to send a few more shafts so that

the head would not fall on the ground but would land in Vriddha-Kshatra's lap. The old man was in his ashrama engaged in his evening meditation. His son's head fell gently in his lap. When the old man finished his meditation and rose up, the head rolled down and fell on the ground. According to the curse of the old man his head burst into pieces and the old man along with his son went to their heavenly abode.

There was great jubilation in Pandava camp. Duryodhana was crest fallen. Dharmaraja elated at Arjuna's success led a fierce attack on Drona's army. It was nightfall. Yet that day the battle was continued despite the rule to stop it at the sunset. In torchlight, the battle was fought fiercely. Like Abhimanyu of Arjuna, Ghatotakacha the son of Bhima from Hidimba was a very brave soldier. As he caused havoc in Kaurava army, Duryodhana requested Karna to kill him. Karna had reserved one unfailing missile to hurl it at Arjuna but when he saw that Ghatotkacha could not be overpowered by any other method, in confusion of that night, he hurled it at Ghatotkacha who instantly fell down dead. Thus Arjuna was saved but a brave and budding young man was lost.

Karna was very powerful with his inborn Kavacha (armour) and the kundalas (ear rings). Indra had managed to take these away. But in return he had given him this Shakti – the very powerful missile, with the condition that it had to be used only once. Karna had reserved it for killing Arjuna. This chance Karna had lost, when he had hurled it at Ghatotkacha. Krishna was therefore very happy at this development in the war. He then became sure that Arjuna was out of danger.

But Yudhishtira felt very unhappy at the death of Ghatotkacha. He was brave and was very useful to the Pandavas in the Kamyaka forest when Arjuna was away on a pilgrimage. He himself rushed at Karna who was the cause of the death of that young hero. But he was persuaded to return by Krishna and Bhagavan Vyasa by telling him that with the loss of that son of Bhima, Arjuna was saved from otherwise sure death at the hands of Karna.

The battle was continued in the night. Arjuna saw that all the soldiers were overpowered by sleep. He suggested cease-fire for about two hours. Both sides agreed. The battle was stopped till moon-rise that day.

Till Bhishma was the commander of the Kaurava army this night-fight was not allowed; with Drona things changed. He caused immense slaughter of the Pandava army, yet Duryodhana complained about Drona's complicity with the Pandavas. He asked him why was he not using his missiles against Bhima, Arjuna and others. Then Drona told him: "If you command me, I shall send these. But poor and innocent soldiers will perish by thousands. I tell you, there is none who can defeat Arjuna. Drona then accused Duryodhana of his ungratefulness and asked him

to lead the battle against Arjuna.

Drona himself rushed to where the Panchalas were giving battle. He instantly killed three grandsons of Drupada. Then he killed Drupada and Virata. Dhrishtadyumna saw his father and sons falling down dead. This was the **fifteenth day** of the war. Drona throwing to winds all rules and regulations of war, caused destruction of Pandava army that was something unimaginable. Many duels were fought between the great warriors on both the sides. But the most wonderful was between Drona and Arjuna. At heart both did not want to fight with each other. Drona loved Arjuna as his own son. Arjuna on his part had the highest regard for Guru Drona. None wanted to kill the other. This unfortunate war had positioned them against each other. They fought bravely and vigorously yet the fight lacked that seriousness. Duryodhana wanted Guru Drona to send his deadly missiles against Arjuna. At last Drona sent the Brahmastra against Arjuna. But Arjuna could counter it by his own Brahmastra and two more astras. Finding the duel with Arjuna futile, he turned his attention to the Panchalas again. Drona in his fury sent the Brahmastra against the Pandava army. In a moment twenty thousand soldiers of the Pandava army fell down dead. The Pandavas felt that it was not Guru Drona who was fighting, but it was some devil. Krishna then said to Dharmaraja: "Drona had adopted all unrighteous means today. He is killing all soldiers indiscriminately. We have also to use unfair means and stop him, otherwise he will devour us all. He will stop, if only we tell him that his son was dead." Arjuna did not like this suggestion. Dharmaraja seeing no other means of stopping him, he agreed. The aim was to see that Drona lays down arms on his own volition.

Bhima killed one elephant named Ashwathiyama and shouted: "I have killed Ashwathiyama" Drona was stunned. But not believing Bhima, he again used Brahmastra and caused terrible destruction. At this sight the sages led by his father assembled in the sky and asked him to stop this inhuman slaughter. Drona listened to them and asked Dharmaraja whether Ashwathiyama had been killed. Dharmaraja replied: "Yes, Ashwathiyama is dead" – But added in a soft tone, "an elephant or a man?" For the first time in life, Dharma spoke a lie. This was his first adharmic act. But he did it at the instance of Krishna to save humanity from total destruction. Drona lost all interest in life. Yet when Dhrishtadyumna came for a duel, he fought it bravely. He broke his sword too. Dhrishtadyumna became defenceless. As he was quite near, Drona shot short arrows called Vaitasmikas. Satyaki watching this adharmic act of the Acharya, in sending the short arrows at the defenceless warrior, sent ten arrows from his bow. They cut Drona's arrows and thus released Dhrishtadyumna from the deathgrip of Drona.

Bhima came on the scene. He spoke harshly: "Oh Brahmana! Why

have you taken up the work of a Kshatriya. You are brahmana by birth, but are acting like a butcher. Why are you doing all this? For whom are you now working? Your son is dead. You teach Dharma to others but will not follow it yourself. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

These words made a dent in Drona's heart. Suddenly he realised that what Bhima spoke was true. He called Duryodhana that he was laying down his arms. He decided to end his life. He sat in a yogic pose. His concentration became intense. Dhrishtadyumna rushed with a sword in hand. All shouted : "Don't kill him, don't kill him, capture him alive." Without heeding anybody's words, he cut off his head and threw it on the ground. All those around condemned him except Bhima.

When Ashwathama learnt about the death of his father, he was beside him-self with anger. He came with a vow to destroy the Pandavas. At the instigation of Duryodhana, he invoked Narayanastra. What a terrible weapon it was! Krishna advised them all to throw away the weapons and fall prostrate before that weapon. He said it will pass away over your heads. Bhima alone stood up. He was burning with the fire of that *astra*. Arjuna sent Varunastra against it. Bhima got some relief. Then both Krishna and Arjuna rushed towards Bhima. They pulled out all the weapons from his body and forced him to lie down. The great *astra* passed away. Krishna's wisdom saved the situation.

Then there began a fight between Dhrishtadyumna and Ashwathama. Arjuna rushed to his aid. He was saved. Then came Bhagavan Vyasa and pacified Ashwathama. He returned to his camp.

Thus ended that terrible day.

On the *sixteenth day* Karna was anointed as commander of the army at the behest of Ashwathama. Bhishma and Drona were partial to the Pandavas. Karna considered Arjuna as his chief rival and enemy.

Karna rushed to the field to destroy Arjuna. Nakul however intercepted him. But he was soon defeated. Then Sahadeva came. He also met the same fate. Karna had promised Kunti not to kill her sons except Arjuna. There were many duels fought on that day. Large scale massacre took place and the day was closed.

Duryodhana was disappointed that Karna did not kill Nakula or Sahadeo, nor did he take on Arjuna.

Karna plainly told Duryodhana that even though he was superior to Arjuna, yet Arjuna's chariot was divine and his quiver was inexhaustible. In addition Krishna the master of the Universe was his charioteer.

Karna then requested Duryodhana to ask Shalya to be his charioteer. Duryodhana rushed to Shalya's camp and with folded palms Duryodhana praised Shalya's skill as a charioteer. He said : "You are superior

to Krishna." Shalya felt elated at these words. He accepted the offer and drove Karna's chariot to the battlefield. On the way Karna began boasting : "I shall defeat the Pandavas and kill Arjuna." Shalya taunted : "Your talk will go on until the twang of the Gandhiva bow is not heard by you," and so on. Karna could defeat Yudhishtira that day. He said to Dharmaraja : "You are a Brahmana by temperament, you are a failure as a Kshatriya." So saying he left Dharmaraja and went to the other sector. Karna also had a fight with Bhima and Ashwathama with Arjuna. Then Arjuna headed towards Karna. Shalya had by then seen the valour and liberality of Karna in releasing Dharma and Bhima from his clutches. He forgot his vow to Dharmaraja to discourage Karna, while he was his charioteer. He began praising Karna about his skill as an archer and said : "you will certainly kill Arjuna." Karna thanked Shalya for his sweet words of praise and promised to come up to his expectations.

Duhshasana was guarding the flank of Karna. Bhima saw it and rushed there. He remembered the insults heaped by him on Draupadi and the oath he had taken to tear asunder his chest and drink his blood. With the blows of his mace, Bhima broke Duhshasana's chariot and killed his horses. He also fell on the ground. Bhima caught him, while Duryodhana, Kripa, Ashwathama and Karna were looking on. He cut the right arm of Duhshasana, which had seized Draupadi's hair, then he broke open this chest and actually drank his blood. He thus fulfilled his vow which he had taken fourteen years ago. What has man made of man!

Vrishasena the son of Karna had also come to fight with Arjuna. After the fight lasting for a while, Vrishasena was also killed in the presence of Karna.

Then Karna and Arjuna were preparing to fight with each other. Ashwathama seeing that, took Duryodhana by the hand and requested him to make peace with the Pandavas; Duryodhana would not listen to that saner counsel. He said, his brother, Duhshasana had been killed. He had now no wish to stay behind. The flowers amongst men, the Kauravas and the Pandavas had a tryst with fell destiny!

Then the fight between Arjuna and Karna began. They fought wonderfully well. It was a fight to the finish. They fought with different astras. Soon Karna's chariot wheel was caught up in the mire. He got down and requested Arjuna to wait a while. He would take out the wheel and then fight. "It is not just and proper when I am in difficulty," Karna had said. Krishna retorted : "Karna, now you remember justice. You were always a party to Duryodhana's unjust acts. Again four days ago you cut Abhimanyu's bow from behind. Was it just and proper?"

Karna's hour to depart had come. Arjuna sent an arrow which could not be warded off. It did the job. His head was cut off and it fell

on the ground.

Karna, a great warrior and born of Kunti, had been dogged since birth by cruel fate. He had to become a friend of Duryodhana. He was against Shakuni's ill designs against the Pandavas, yet because of his friendship with Duryodhana he had to be party to all of Duryodhana's dirty and deceitful acts including the humiliation of Draupadi.

This great and noble soul had to pay the price of his friendship with this wicked man, with his own life. A tragedy of the first magnitude was enacted at the behest of that unscrupulous adventurer, Duryodhana the great.

On the *seventeenth day* of war Duryodhana was a picture of woe. With the death of Karna, Duryodhana's overweening ambition was dead. He went to battle-field to meet his grandfather Bhishma who was lying on the bed of arrows. When that grandsire heard the death of Karna, he was sorry for it. He said a true Kshatriya as he was had laid down his life for the friend-ship of Duryodhana. Bhishma then told him that he was Kaunteya and not Radheya.

This news gave Duryodhana a great shock. He realised how true and great was Karna's friendship.

Kripacharya then went to meet Duryodhana. Kripa then told Duryodhana how he and Ashwathama were fond of him. He requested him to stop the fight and save his life. He told him that Kshatriya code of honour had been destructive. It need not have been like that. Krishna and the Pandavas would be ready to make peace with him.

Duryodhana knew that Kripacharya had been very sincere in saying these words. He said : "You are my first Acharya and you have been very fond of me, yet the time to make peace was when you had first advised me. Now that time is past."

"Oh great Acharya! Now Yudhishtira would be the King and I shall have to be dependent on him. That position I cannot tolerate. I am set on war. Don't misunderstand me?"

On the *eighteenth day* with Ashwathama's advice Shalya was appointed the commander of the Kaurava army. The 11 divisions constituted of the flower of the youth of the then Bharata - which then included the present day Afghanistan and some areas of Iran was reduced to a ghost of what it was eighteen days ago. Yet the number was still large. Shalya decided that there should be no duels as the numbers of warriors on both sides were very few. It was to be a general war. But this decision proved disastrous. It turned out to be a wholesale slaughter. There was also a sort of duel between Shalya and Dharmaraja. A javelin was thrown at the chest of Shalya by Dharmaraja. Shalya

fell down dead.

When Shalya fell, Duryodhana himself took over the command of his army. Shakuni and his son Uluka ably assisted him. Duryodhana's remaining brothers were also with him. Bhima had vowed to kill them all. He came forward and could kill them all except Sudarshana.

Arjuna was constantly harrassed by the Trigarta's suicide squad from the beginning of the war. Their King Susharma was finally killed by Arjuna and that chapter was closed.

Shakuni entered the fray with his elephant army. His son Uluka had been killed by Nakula. Seeing this, Shakuni began running away from the battlefield. Sahadeo ran after him and challenged him to a duel. Sahadeo accused him of being the main factor in instigating Duryodhana in indulging in all the dastardly acts. Sahadeo threw a javelin at him and killed him.

Of the 11 divisions only Duryodhana, Ashwathiyama, Kripa and Kritavarma were left. On the Pandava side, of the 7 divisions two hundred chariots, seven hundred elephants, one thousand horses and some foot men were left.

It appeared to be all over. Dharmaraja had become the king. But soon Ashwathiyama, Kripa and Kritavarma met Sanjaya, Duryodhana's charioteer. He told them that Duryodhana was cooling himself in the waters of the Dvaipayana lake. They approached the lake and spoke softly : "Come out, oh King! we three of us are still alive. We shall give a fight to the Pandavas and finish them. Please come out." Duryodhana was very happy to hear these sweet words. But he told them that he was tired and they would fight with the Pandavas, the next day.

Some hunters, who had come to the lake to drink water, happened to overhear this conversation accidentally. They went to Bhima and told him of the whereabouts of Duryodhana. They were rewarded.

It was evening time. The Pandava heroes came to the lake. Ashwathiyama and others heard them coming. They conveyed to Duryodhana the news of their coming and disappeared. They then came to a banyan tree nearby, unyoked their horses from the chariot and took shelter under its shade.

Yudhishtira came to the side of the lake and called out to Duryodhana : "Why are you hiding here? You have caused the death of all your relatives and the other Kshatriyas of Bharatavarsha. You are hailed as a hero. Don't hide now, come out and fight."

From inside the lake, Duryodhana replied : "Stop this senseless talk. I am not hiding. My horse led me to some place. It died on the way. I then walked aimlessly. I saw this lake. I wanted to cool myself. All my relations are no more. So what is the use of the kingdom

to me now? Yet I shall come out and fight. But I am without armour or weapons. Well, I am ready to die and join Karna in heaven."

Yudhishtira's anger was pacified. He said: "You can come out and fight with any one of us with whatever weapon you want."

Duryodhana came out and said: "I shall fight with you one by one and send you all to heaven."

Krishna upbraided Yudhishtira for his liberality. He said: "Duryodhana is skilful. He can kill all of you one by one. Why did you make such a foolish offer?"

Bhima came forward and pacified Krishna. He said he would fight with Duryodhana and kill him. He then challenged Duryodhana for a fight with him, with the mace.

While they were preparing for a mace-fight, Balarama who had been out on tour of the holy places came there. Everybody was happy to see him. Bhima and Duryodhana were his pupils in learning the art of mace (Gada) fight. He told them to fight at *Syamantapanchaka* a holy spot near about. They all walked together to that place.

The fight began. Duryodhana was more than a match for Bhima. It appeared, he would soon overpower him. Then Arjuna indicated Bhima to break his thighs. Bhima had made a vow to break these when he had bared them before Draupadi shamelessly. When Duryodhana was leaping up, Bhima aimed his blow at his thighs and broke them. Duryodhana fell on ground. Bhima then jumped up and placed his foot on his head. Yudhishtira told him not to repeat it. Yudhishtira was sorry for the death of this man who had brought about the ruin of this world.

It was the rule of this fight that no one should strike the opponent below the waist. Bhima had thus killed Duryodhana unfairly. Balarama was terribly angry at this. He lifted his plough (his special weapon) and rushed at Bhima with a view to kill him. Krishna in time moved forward and held his brother firmly. He told him: "Maybe this particular act was against the rules. But Bhima had vowed to break his thighs. He had to fulfil his vow; moreover, you forget the mountain of injustices heaped by this single man on the Pandavas. Even so I tried to avert the war. But this man was so obstinate, I should have killed him long ago."

Balarama blessed Duryodhana for his bravery. He said: "This stands to the eternal credit of Duryodhana and lasting shame of Bhima." With these words, he left for Dwaraka. Bhima was crestfallen. But Yudhishtira and Krishna congratulated him for his success. Krishna called Duryodhana as the greatest sinner in history.

Duryodhana then heaped abuse on Krishna and Yudhishtira for their unfair tactics, in fighting this war.

IX

ASHWATHYAMA'S VOW

Krishna finally said that no sin can attach to anybody if he were to kill a wicked but invincible man by unfair means. Ashwathyama, however, was sorely upset at this killing of Duryodhana by unfair means. He went to the spot where Duryodhana was lying mortally wounded and vowed to kill all the Pandavas by unfair means. The killing of his father by the Pandavas by unfair means, did also rankle in his heart. When, therefore, Ashwathyama took such a terrible vow Duryodhana even in his agony appointed Ashwathyama as the Supreme commander of his forces – what a joke! He wished him all success in his mission.

Dur to fatigue, Kripa and Kritavarma fell asleep. Ashwathyama was however wide awake. He was brooding over his plan of action. During the night an owl came on that banyan tree and began attacking the birds which were resting on its branches. The crows could not see during night. They all fell victim to the attack of that big owl.

This act of the owl suggested to Ashwathyama his plan. He thought to himself, "If Pandavas can kill my father unfairly and if they also can challenge Duryodhana to a fight when he needed rest most, why can I not kill them in sleep, when I am so helpless?"

He immediately woke up Kripacharya and apprised him of his plan. Kripa was aghast. He said : "What a dastardly plan you have conceived? Duryodhana was not an ideal king. He was a cruel man. He treated the Pandavas, the legitimate heirs to the throne so unjustly. Did he not show his thighs to the Empress of the Kurus, Draupadi? Had not Bhima taken the vow to break these thighs? Bhima fulfilled his vow. How can you accuse him of the sin? Well! Your father has been killed unfairly. Let us, three of us give the Pandavas the challenge for an open fight. But to kill them thus will be the most heinous crime."

Ashwathyama was adamant. He was in no mood to listen. The death of his father was still a raw wound. Duryodhana was his friend. He decided to execute the plan alone. Then Kripa and Kritavarma decided to join him. Good or bad they had decided to share in common.

They reached the camp of Dhrishtadyumna. Ashwathyama entered it. Kripa and Kritavarma were at the gate promising not to allow anyone to escape without a fight.

Ashwathyama kicked Dhrishtadyumna who woke up and said : "Do not kill me thus. Let us fight." But Ashwathyama spoke like one who was possessed. He strangled him and flushed life out of him.

Hearing the noise, others awoke. The Panchalas, Drupadi's five sons, Shikhandin and all the troops were killed by Ashwathyama. Kripa and Kritavarma set fire to the camp. All were burnt in it.

These men acted like beasts. Nay! even worse than beasts. For, beasts do not kill others of their kind. These men who do not deserve to be called men, perpetrated this inhuman deed, this midnight massacre.

Drunk with wild hilariousness, they rushed to Duryodhana. He was still struggling with death. Ashwathyama with uncontrollable glee apprised Duryodhana, of what he had done. The king blessed him and died a happy man. On Pandavas' side only the five Pandavas and Krishna and Satyaki were saved, for they had been to Hastinapura to console the parents of Duryodhana. Krishna entered the palace and met Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. He consoled them with the words : "Mother, it is Duryodhana, who has brought this about. When I entered this palace last time, on a peace mission, Duryodhana tried to capture me. You had also said, when he came to seek your blessings - "Where there is righteousness there is victory." Mother, your words have come true. Yudhishtira also tried to avoid war. But that was not to be. We had all a tryst with destiny. Please be kind to the Pandavas. They are your sons." Both of them were pacified.

He then returned to the Pandavas and spent the night outside the camp of Duryodhana. The same night Ashwathyama perpetrated that heinous crime of murdering the sleeping men. Can we sit on judgement on the workings of Nemesis?

They all came to Dhrishtadyumna's camp and witnessed the ghastly scene. The Pandavas fainted at the sight. Who would console whom? Nakula then brought Draupadi to the scene. Her grief was unimaginable. It could not be assuaged by words.

After a while she rose. She looked like a Chandika with fire leaping out of her eyes. She said : "Unless this man Ashwathyama is killed, I shall not eat, I shall die on the spot." When she was told that Ashwathyama is blessed with eternal life. She said : "Ashwathyama has a jewel on his head. Bring that to me. It will be as good as death to him." She bade Bhima to do the job.

Ashwathyama had a formidable weapon *Brahmasheersha-astra* given to him by his father. It was also given to Arjuna by Drona as he was his beloved pupil. Bhima set out in search of Ashwathyama. To protect him, Krishna and Arjuna followed.

Ashwathyama was on the bank of Ganga hiding behind Bhagavan Vyasa. When he saw Bhima and Arjuna approaching, he took a blade of grass and invoked that terrible astra and sent it towards the Pandavas with the words : "May this destroy the of the Pandavas. Krishna seeing

this asked Arjuna to send his to counter its power. Before they could collide together and cause the destruction of the world, the sages Narada and Vyasa stopped these in the air by their hands. So great was their power of penance. They requested both of them to withdraw these. Arjuna readily accepted their suggestion and withdrew his. Ashwathyama could not do it, as he had lost that power by his coldblooded murder of the Panchalas. He expressed his helplessness to these sages. He then saved Bhima and Arjuna, but directed it against the son of Abhimanyu whom his wife Uttarā was bearing in her womb.

Krishna was terribly angry with Ashwathyama. He made him part with the Gem and cursed him to wander alone in misery till eternity. He promised to restore the life of the child of Uttarā.

X

YUDHISHTHIRA CROWNED EMPEROR

We have begun the life of Shrikrishna with the narration of this supreme act of his life.

Dhritarashtra was disconsolate. Sanjaya the friend and charioteer of Dhritarashtra, and Vidura tried to pacify him. They told him that it was he who had brought about this destruction. He admitted, Vyasa then came and coaxed him to compose himself and go to the field of battle. He pointed out the necessity of bringing the dead and to cremate them.

Along with Dhritarashtra walked Gandhari and the other women of the palace and the city to see their dead ones on the field. They all came and seeing their dear relations lying dead on the field, they all cried bitterly. But it was all of no avail.

Pandavas now set out for Hastinapura. They were returning to the city after fourteen years. Yudhishtira was now the king. But over whom was he to rule? All his kinsmen and friends had died on the battle field. All his sons also were massacred by Ashwathyama. What did he achieve by this war, victory or defeat? This question agitated him most.

When the Pandavas learnt that Dhritarashtra had been to the battlefield, they also along with Krishna went to visit the blind man there. Yudhishtira introduced himself to the old man who outwardly spoke gently to him, but inwardly he was burning with rage and hatred. When Bhima was proceeding towards him, Krishna immediately brought the iron image of his and placed it before him. The old King remembered Bhima to be the killer of his sons. The old man tightened his grip about it so hard that he was wet with his own blood. The iron image was

crushed to powder. The effort caused him immense fatigue and he fell on the ground in a faint. He was soon revived. Then he began to cry : "Oh! I have killed Bhima, I have killed my own child," and so on.

Soon he was told that Bhima was safe and what he had crushed was his iron image. He was afterwards pacified. Before the Pandavas could go to meet Gandhari, Vyasa hurried to her side, and gently said : "Oh my daughter! Don't get angry with the Pandavas; you had said to Duryodhana - 'where there is Dharma, there will be victory.' You knew that your sons were engaged in sinful activities. If you become angry with them now, you will have undone all the good you have done so far."

Gandhari said : "Father, I am not angry with the Pandavas. They are my sons too. But was it right for Bhima to drink blood of Duhshasana, his own brother? Should he have killed Duryodhana by unfair means?"

Bhima was listening to her. He came forward and said : "Mother I did act unjustly. Your son was a great fighter. There was none to match his valour. In self defence I had to do it. Pardon me, you know he had harassed us. Moreover I had taken a vow to break his thighs. Mother, you know all that." Gandhari was pleased at the praise, Bhima had showered on her son. Further, she asked him, was it not cruel to drink blood of his brother Duhshasana? Bhima admitted it was, but he had taken a vow, in a moment of passion. So he had to do it. He begged her pardon again. Gandhari was pacified.

Then she enquired : "Where is the King?" Yudhishtira came forward and fell at her feet and with folded palms, he said, "Mother, I am a sinful person. I am the cause of all this destruction. I deserve your curses."

Gandhari seeing Yudhishtira in all humility, turned her face away lest her gaze even through the silken scarf might burn Yudhishtira.

The Pandavas then met Kunti their mother after fourteen years. She lovingly embraced them again and again. She took that unfortunate Draupadi in her arms and said : "My daughter, what words can pacify you?" Gandhari also embraced Draupadi and said : "Look at me. I have lost all my sons as you have done. It is really the end of the world. All this was prophesied by Vidura and Krishna. None can avert the Destiny."

Together they walked through the battle field. The thought of all her sons lying dead on the battle-field roused Gandhari's anger. She turned to Krishna and said : "Do you hear, oh Krishna! the piteous wails of the thousands of princesses and the women of other warriors? Who is the cause? Your indifference, oh Krishna, your indifference is the cause of this wholesale destruction of the Kshatriyas. You alone could have averted this unprecedented tragedy. If it is true that I have

performed penance, I curse you. Thirty-six years hence, just as the Kurus have destroyed themselves, none from your Vrishni family will survive, your women will weep, as these women are weeping here."

Krishna with his sweetest smile ever said : "Mother, I am indebted to you, Vrishnis are indestructible. I would have been required to destroy them. But your curse has solved the problem for me. But, oh mother, do not get angry with the Pandavas. They are part of me."

He then appealed to her : "Oh mother! Grieve not, you are by nature virtuous. Do not allow your anger to cloud your vision. You were too fond of your son Duryodhana. You did not curb his vicious nature. You knew Shakuni your brother; you should not have allowed him to stay in your house. You were indifferent, not I, from the very beginning, as you accuse me of. Why did you allow Duryodhana and Shakuni to wallow in sin. You knew the house of wax. Why did you not prevent that horrifying action of your son? You know, I came to Hastinapura to prevent the war. I tried to coax Duryodhana to be fair to the Pandavas, you were indifferent, were you not? Dhritarashtra allowed the injustice to flourish under his own eyes. You did not try to prevent it. Did you? You just told me, you said to Duryodhana - where there is Dharma, there is victory.' And now you put blame on me." When Krishna said this, Gandhari was speechless.

Then all arrangements for cremation were made. It was soon over. Oblations to the departed souls were offered. There was no relation of Karna to offer him these oblations, Kunti could no longer hold the secret. She had borne it till then somehow. She slowly came forward and put her hand on the shoulders of Dharmaraja. She gently told him : "Karna was not Radheya, but was Kaunteya." Dharmaraja and his brothers were stunned at this revelation. She slowly told them the whole story. Krishna knew it. Karna himself knew it. The Pandavas had from the beginning treated him as their enemy. They were most unhappy. They even forgot the deaths of their own sons, in the grief of their eldest brother Karna. Yudhishtira paid him the funeral oblations and plunged in uncontrollable grief. Arjuna had felled him in the most unjust manner.

Yudhishtira then lost all interest in being the King of the Kingdom won after terrible war in which his own brother had been killed. He almost decided to go to forest. But the sages made him realize his duty as a King. A King's first duty was to look after the welfare of his subjects. He had no right to personal enjoyments or griefs.

Vyasa was very happy to see that Yudhishtira was ready to take interest in looking after the welfare of his subjects. He advised him to go to his grandfather and learn from him the art of good governance.

A period of one month was observed as the period of mourning

for all the dead. Yudhishtira along with his brothers then entered the city of Hastinapura ceremonially seated in a chariot drawn by sixteen white bullocks. He was followed by Yuyutsu the only surviving son of Dhritarashtra. Then came Krishna's chariot in which Satyaki was accommodated. Then came the women of the royal household carried in palanquins. It was a grand procession with horses, elephants and footmen.

Krishna fulfilled his vow by seating Yudhishtira on the throne. Coronation ceremony was immediately performed. Dharmaraja took the oath of office by publicly promising good and just government. He stated that Dhritarashtra was still the King as he had been all those years. Bhima was crowned as the yuvaraja and Vidura was the Prime Minister, Sanjaya the close friend of Dhritarashtra was the finance minister. Arjuna was commander-in-chief as well as the foreign minister, Dhaumya was the High Priest. Nakula was the defence minister, and Sahadeo was Minister-in-attendance on the Emperor Yudhishtira. Yuyutsu the surviving son of Dhritarashtra was the Governor of a few provinces as well as the Minister-in-attendance on his parents.

Yudhishtira was aware that he was under tremendous obligations of Krishna. He said it was impossible to repay the debt he owed to him. He was the Lord and the Eternal Soul. He fell at his feet and washed them with his tears. Krishna told him that he was going to meet Bhishma the next day morning and that Yudhishtira should accompany them.

They met the Grandsire, sleeping on the bed of arrows. Krishna praised him for his fortitude and courage in bearing the excruciating pain caused by the hundreds of arrows pricking him. He also stated that he was the home of all knowledge as he had learnt it directly from Brihaspati the Guru of the Devas and from Shukra the Guru of the Asuras. He had also obtained knowledge from Vasishtha and Markandeya. He therefore requested him to impart instructions in all the branches of knowledge to Yudhishtira.

Bhishma was over-whelmed with joy at the love and affection shown to him by Krishna whom he regarded as the Lord of the universe. Bhishma however, expressed his inability to impart the knowledge to Yudhishtira as his voice had become feeble. Krishna assured him that he would have the necessary strength and that he would have 30 days more to live. Then Bhishma told him : "Lord! you are the master. How can I say anything before the master?" Then Krishna told him that he had decided to bring him eternal glory : "Your words would set the tone for righteous action in this world. You will thus live forever," he said "Yudhishtira has a guilty conscience. He feels, he was the cause of death of all his cousins and the Kshatriyas." The old Veteran then told Yudhishtira that the Kshatriya's duty was to protect Dharma. For that purpose he would have to kill if necessary.

XI

KING'S DUTIES

Bhishma then instructed him in the duties of a King.

"The King has essentially to be a man of action. Destiny plays an important part in every man's life and it has its place in King's life too. But what is Destiny? It is the sum total of your actions. So initiate proper course of action."

"You have to inspire confidence in the minds of your people so let truth prevail and inform all your actions."

"The King's behaviour should be above reproach. Self-control, humility and righteousness are the qualities which help a King to attain success in his undertaking."

"He should conceal the weaknesses of his Kingdom and secure knowledge of the weaknesses of others."

"The King should love to impart justice to his subjects. He should be straightforward in his dealings."

"He should not be too mild. For then he will be disregarded. At the same time he should not be too tough. His actions should be marked by compassion."

"The King's first concern should be the welfare of his subjects. He should not be too open or too secretive. He should not place implicit confidence in anybody. He should always conceal his inner most thoughts."

"He should have a perfect system of spies. He should make peace with a stronger foe. If the enemy is equal in strength, fight with him. If he is weaker invade his country. He should cause dissensions in the enemy ranks. He should win over enemy officers by bribes."

"He should be pleasant in speech. His officers should be of like nature."

"The King should treat his subjects like his children. The wicked should be dealt with severely. The pious should be protected the honest should be encouraged."

"Proper persons for proper jobs should be chosen. He should inflict corporal punishments after due deliberation. Impose adequate fines on miscreants."

"Kshatriya has his origin in the Brahmana, who should therefore be protected at all costs. Iron has its origin in a stone and water has origin in fire. The origin should be protected, otherwise if the source is destroyed its progeny gets weakened."

"Raja (King) is so called, for he keeps his subjects happy (*praja-anuranjanat*). He has to be stern with the wicked and mild with the pious."

"Even a teacher, who does not behave properly, requires to be punished."

"He should strive to attain the fourfold objective – Dharma, Artha (wealth), Kama (satisfaction of desires) and Moksha" (liberation or detachment to pleasure or pain)."

"Men with good qualities should be fostered. Those with infatuation, anger, greed, haughtiness, jealousy, lust, should be suppressed."

"Knowledge is of four kinds – the Vedas (the knowledge of sacrificial ritual), the *Anvikshiki* (the pure knowledge, philosophy or basic knowledge of all arts and sciences), Varta (art of cultivation, commerce, mining, etc) and Dandaniti (Administration of Kingdom with a view to ensure discipline in his subjects)."

"In foreign affairs, the King's policy should be based on *Sama* – (conciliation), *Dama* (bribery), *Danda* (use of force), *Bheda* (divisions amongst enemies and miscreants) and *Upeksha* (indifference) to secure your objective."

"The ministers, the people, the build-up of strategic points, army and treasury, these are the five pillars of the Kingdom."

"Chariots (in modern terms, aerial power), elephants (tanks), horses (mobile units), sappers and miners, navy, the spies, and well-versed advisors are the eight limbs of the king."

"The measures adopted by the King in any branch of administration should be effective and practical. Secrecy should be observed in all political and diplomatic dealings." "Gambling, wine and women should be avoided."

"The society has to be structured on four Varnas and four Ashramas—celibacy, house-holder, forest-dweller, renunciation – the stages in man's life. If administration is effective, the people do not tend to be selfish and self-centred. The rulers are the mainstay of the society. Political anarchy destroys the society. The King is the regulator of all actions in the society. The other elements cannot do that. So the King has to be righteous and firm. We talk of Krita yuga (the era of truth), Treta (the era of righteousness) Dvapara (a society based on truth and righteousness and Kali (the era in which unrighteousness prevails). Which era should be ushered in depends on the King. If the King is good, the society is good and if he is evil-minded, unrighteousness prevails in the society. In effect the King is yuga or era. The particular age does not make the King. It is the King who is the cause of the age. That society thrives where the Kshatriyas

pay respect to the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas who are brahmanas in name only, are like ordinary people and do not deserve special treatment. Only those who are well-versed in the Vedas and are wedded to righteous action, deserve special treatment."

"The King should take 1/6 of the produce or income of his subjects. The taxes should be levied or collected like a bee which collects honey, little by little and without being hurt by the thorns of the flower plants. The King should in like manner collect the taxes without hurting himself or his subjects from whom the taxes are being collected."

Bhishma then lays down the qualities of the legislators, army officers and the ministers.

"The legislators should be persons of high integrity, modesty and sincerity. They should be bold enough to speak the truth and what is proper in the interests of the subjects. The army officers should be brave, intelligent and loyal to the King. Foreigners should not be employed in the army or in the administration.

The ministers should be 37 in all, distributed as under : Four should be Brahmanas i.e. very intelligent and well-versed in all arts and sciences. They should be learned in the Vedas and virtuous. There should be eight Kshatriyas highly trained in the use of different weapons. They should also be physically strong and virtuous. Twentyone vaishyas from wealthy families should be employed as ministers in charge of cultivation, business and industry. They should be above suspicion of corruption and three should be from Shudra - varna to guard the interests of the labour group. One should belong to the Suta-caste. He would be incharge of historical records. He should be a historian himself. All ministers should be mature in age and distinguished members of the society. Covetousness leads to sin and virtuousness leads to glory."

Bhishma ultimately told Yudhishtira that Krishna was the God of all the gods. He is the embodiment of Dharma; worship him," he exhorted the King.

Bhishma departs : That holy day, on which Bhishma had decided to leave, arrived. All the citizens of Hastinapura led by the King Yudhishtira came to the spot. Dhritarashtra and Krishna accompanied them. Bhishma opened his eyes and saw that great assemblage. He was moved to tears. Bhishma blessed them all. He called Dhritarashtra to his side. He told him that Yudhishtira and others were devoted to him. "Be happy with them," he said.

He then turned to Krishna. He sought his permission to leave. He had one request to make. He said : "Oh Lord! show me your Vishvarupa, before I go." Lord Krishna then appeared before him in his cosmic splendour. The whole universe with its stars and galaxies were seen

in Him by Bhishma. Lord Krishna then gave him permission to depart. Bhishma became immensely happy and contented. He had no desire left. He prepared himself to go. Soon a glow from him came out and rose up to the high heavens and then became unseen.

The King Yudhishtira performed his funeral with royal honours and returned to Hastinapura.

Parikshita born : The death of so many kinsmen and friends on the battlefield was a great strain on Yudhishtira. He could not easily forget all what had happened. Observing this state of mind of Yudhishtira, Bhagavan Vyasa suggested that Yudhishtira should perform the Ashvamedha yajna. Yudhishtira and his brothers liked the idea. Krishna with his Vrishni family was invited. Arjuna along with other brothers went to the Himalayas. Yudhishtira and Dhritarashtra had also accompanied. They found immense wealth buried there by the Maruttas of Ikshvaku line. No King worth the name was then alive. All the Kings were young. They came to Hastinapura as guests of Yudhishtira. Krishna also came. The Pandavas brought the wealth from the Himalayas.

As we have seen at the beginning, the child of Uttara was still-born. All the women of the palace were plunged in grief. Lord Krishna gave him life and secured the heir to the house of the Pandavas. This was perhaps the only revival of the dead, done by Krishna during his sojourn here on earth. This was a must. Otherwise, the Pandava line would have been extinct. With the revival of the child born dead, the palace became a temple of joy.

Ashvamedha was then duly performed. This yajna pacified the King Yudhishtira greatly. He ruled very wisely.

XII

THE LAST PHASE

The Bharata war was fought for the establishment of Dharma. This was the objective of Krishna's avatahood. Having accomplished it, Krishna returned to Dwaraka. Dharmaraja ruled as an ideal King.

After the completion of Yudhishtira's fifteen years of righteous rule, Dhritarashtra felt that time had come for his departure for living in a forest. When he expressed this wish to Yudhishtira the King, he (the King) would not agree. He was daily enquiring about Dhriharashtra and Gandhari and seeing that they were comfortable. In spite of his best efforts to see them comfortable, when he received their request for retirement to forest, he felt a great shock. However Vyasa persuaded him to allow them to retire to forest. To his surprise, Dharmaraja found his mother Kunti also accompanying them. She was adamant and would not like to return to the palace. Sanjay accompanied this trio.

These three stayed in forest for three years. One day, there was wild fire in the forest. Dhritarashtra told Sanjaya to move about as quickly as possible. These three decided to stay put and die. They sat in yogic pose facing the east and the fire burned their mortal coils and their souls went to heaven.

Sanjaya retired to the Himalayas and spent the rest of the days as a Sannyasin.

Krishna passes away. Dharmaraja ruled at Hastinapura for 36 years in all. During the last year of his reign, he got a message from Krishna to send Arjuna to take away the Yadava women and children. All the Yadava males had died in internecine feuds.

It happened this way : The Yadavas, one day came across some sages. They played a practical joke on them. They dressed Samba one of the Yadava young men as a pregnant woman. They took him to the sage and asked them : "She is expecting a child. Will it be a male or a female?"

The sages saw through the irreverent joke and cursed them saying that the child would neither be a male nor a female, but it will be 'an iron rod' which would destroy the 'House of Vrishnis'.

The yadava young men were horrified at what they had done.

Samba actually gave birth to an iron rod. They took it to Balarama and Krishna. Balarama was very upset. He ordered the rod to be crushed into powder and throw the powder away in the sea. They felt that they had outwitted their fate.

After some years, the Yadavas as was their custom went for a picnic near Prabhasa. While they were spending the days merrily a drunken brawl arose amongst them. Satyaki had a grievance against Kritavarma for he had joined Duryodhana in that Bharata war and was a party to Ashvathama's midnight massacre. They both were drunk. The brawl became a fight in which Satyaki beheaded Kritavarma. As there were no weapons available they pulled out the sticks of the seaweeds which had sprung up from that powdered iron bar. There was a bloody fight. Krishna saw this and could not stop the war. All were killed in that fight.

Balarama saw that his end had come. He sat in a yogic pose and gave up his life. Krishna then sent his charioteer Daruka to Yudhishtira requesting him to send Arjuna to take away all the Yadava women and children to Hastinapura. He conveyed the curse of the sage to Yudhishtira through Daruka.

Arjuna had a dream in which Krishna told him : "Everything in this world has a purpose. My purpose is served. Yours also is over. I have to go away. You come a little later and join me." One day

Krishna was asleep at Prabhasa. He had his yellow robe on. A hunter was passing by. He mistook the sleeping figure to be of a deer. He shot his arrow at it. The arrow pierced the sole of his feet. It entered his body and he died.

The world was without Krishna. Was it? or is it? Krishna is the very soul of it.

End of Dwaraka : As commanded by Dharmaraj, Arjuna had come to Dwaraka. He then collected all the women and children of the Yadavas and started for Hastinapura. Dwaraka was empty. Soon the sea became rough and Dwaraka was engulfed by the waves of the sea.

After Krishna had left, Dwaraka remained just a name, a memory. On way to Hastinapura, Arjuna was attacked by a gang of robbers. Arjuna to his surprise found that he could not use his bow or arrow effectively, nor could he invoke any of the missiles. Most of the women along with their jewellery were taken away by the robbers. with whosoever were left, Arjuna could somehow reach Hastinapura. His role as Arjuna had come to an end.

Parikshita crowned : When all the Pandavas learnt of the death of Krishna, they lost all interest in life. They crowned Parikshita, Abhimanyu's son as the King and left for pilgrimage along with Draupadi and finally reached the Himalayas. A dog had joined them as their companion somewhere on their pilgrimage. They crossed Himavan. They reached Meru. Soon they were exhausted. Draupadi fell down dead. Then Sahadeo fell. Nakul and Arjuna followed them. It was then Bhima's turn.

Dharmaraja enters heaven : When his queen and four Pandavas were dead, Dharmaraja was proceeding on his way to heaven. Indra came along in his chariot and requested him to get into the chariot. Yudhishtira refused on the ground that he would like to take his wife and the four brothers who had died on the way also along with him. Indra told him : "They are already in heaven. I have come specially for you as you are my equal." The Dharmaraja wanted the dog accompanying him thus far also to be taken into the chariot of the Indra. To such a request Indra objected and said : "Dogs have no place in heaven. You alone have to come leaving the dog behind." Dharmaraja, howsoever persuaded, would not agree to enter heaven without the dog. Instantly in the place of the dog, Dharmaraja saw his father Dharma, standing before him. He said : "I am pleased at your steadfastness in adhering to Dharma in all the circumstances. He was then taken to the hall in the heaven. He saw many of illustrious predecessors of his house. He also saw many other great souls who had adorned the pages of Time. He saw Duryodhana also, but not his brothers or his queen.

He was surprised. He would not stay in that great hall even for a moment. He told Indra in so many words. He was horrified to

see the most wicked man Duryodhana in that great hall of heaven, but there were none of his brothers or other friends or relatives who had suffered so much because they were virtuous. He enquired of the reason. The inmates of heaven told him that because Duryodhana had followed the tenets of Kshatra-Dharma and laid down his life on the battlefield, he had been admitted to heaven straightaway. While Dharmaraja's sons had committed certain sins while following their Dharma; they were for the time being in hell. He was taken to that side. That region was dark and he had to wade through the slippery slime of blood and filth. Yudhishtira was horrified and was unable to bear that sight full of stench. He was about to turn back, when he heard the voices of his brothers and Draupadi. Then he decided to stay there. He told the messenger of Indra to return and tell Indra of his decision.

Then again Yama-Dharma – the God of death along with Indra appeared before him and praised his virtuousness. He said all virtuous men, for the little sin they had committed during their sojourn in the world of mortals, have to suffer a little here. But they are all the denizens of the heaven and not of hell.

Thus ended the journey of that most virtuous soul Dharmaraja. It has rightly been said – “धर्मो विवर्धति युद्धिष्ठिरं कीर्तनेन। *dharmo vivardhati yudhishtira kīrtanena*. By singing the glory of the life of Yudhishtira, one learns to lead a virtuous life.” This story of the Pandavas has become immortal. They have lived the life dictated by the rules of Dharma and so their tale will live so long as the world lives, the rivers flow and the sun and the moon move round in their orbits.

Bharata Savitri–Epilogue – The essence of Bharata : This story told by the celebrated Vyasa to his son Shuka is of the trials and tribulations of man, the best representative of that ONE, since the beginning of Time, the man has experienced and will continue to experience the joyful union of the thousands of parents with their sons, the man with his woman, as well as their painful separation in this world. The man enjoys thousands of pleasure-giving events and hundreds of awe-inspiring incidents. The learned is not bewildered by either of those.

The poet here gives vent to his piteous wail and cries aloud : “oh ye men! with my two hands out-stretched, I am beseeching you. Dharma is the source of your wealth and the spring which satisfies all your desires. Why don't you follow the dictates of Dharma?”

“Never abandon the path of virtuous conduct. It should not be abandoned through lust, fear or covetousness, nor to save one's own life. For Dharma (the code of virtuous conduct) is eternal. And the feelings of pleasure or pain are ephemeral. Again the individual soul is permanent and the cause of its bondage is temporary.”

Therefore, follow Dharma and lead a happy and contented life.

Notes

- 1 Nehru J. Discovery of India - Allahabad 1945, p.
- 2 ibid p.53.
- 3 ibid p.55.
- 4 ibid p.171.
- 5 ibid p.121.
- 6 Babasahib Ambedkar - Riddles in Hinduism Vol.4 Education Dept. Government of Maharashtra p.8
- 7 ibid 44.
- 8 ibid
- 9 S.N. Dasgupta - A History of Indian Philosophy 1922 p.27
- 10 V.S. Agrawal - Sparks from the Vedic Fire.
- 11 V.S. Sukhatankar - Ghate's Lectures on Rigveda 1915.
- 12 Nehru J. Op.Cit.-p.50
- 13 ibid p.78
- 14 ibid p.82
- 15 ibid p.60
- 16 ibid p.61
- 17 Ambedkar Op.Cit.-p.163
- 18 ibid p.108, 295
- 19 ibid p.109, 295
- 20 ibid p.301 ft.
- 21 ibid p.82
- 22 ibid p.301
- 23 ibid p.102
- 24 ibid p.5
- 25 R.V.I-164-46
- 26 Ambedkar, Op.Cit.-p.5
- 27 ibid p.79
- 28 ibid
- 29 ibid
- 30 ibid p.302
- 31 ibid p.353
- 32 ibid
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- 34 Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics 1980 Vol.8 p.435.
- 35 Ambedkar Op.Cit.-p.302.
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- 38 ibid
- 39 ibid
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- 41 Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics - Feet Washing.
- 42 ibid
- 43 ibid p.823.
- 44 ibid Vol. 3. p.657
- 45 ibid
- 46 ibid
- 47 Mahabharata 3-281-22
- 48 MBH. 3 246-35.
- 49 Ramayama 4-5-12
- 50 Shatapatha Br.3-3-1-1
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Part I and II of this Volume are written by Dr. V. V. Gangal. They are specially written to remove certain misconceptions of our History. We consider the Epics to be the records of our ancient history. I record my appreciation of his contribution to this vital subject.

The rest of the book is written by me.

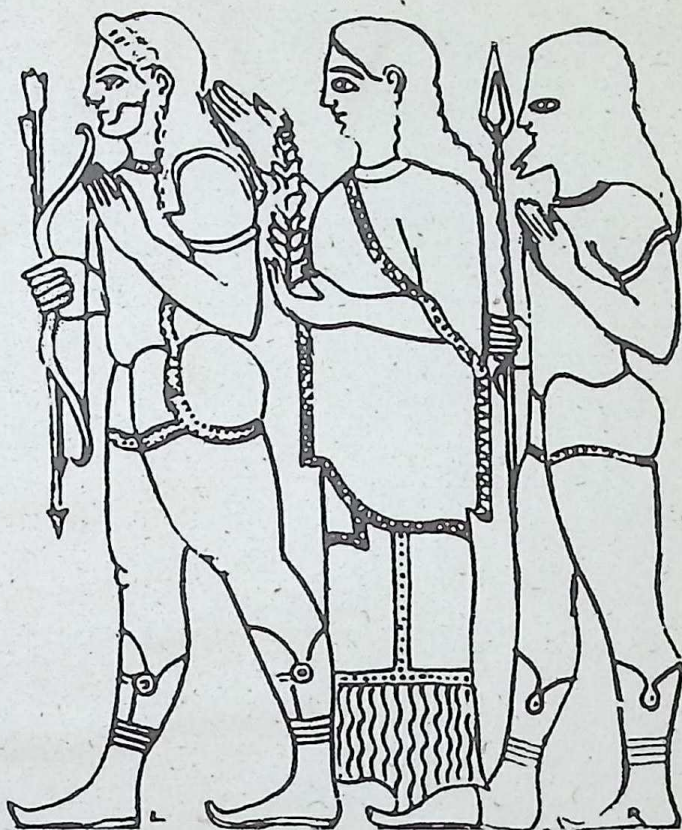
The artist Shri. Satish Khot has drawn a beautiful picture of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. He deserves special mention.

Shri. Satish Bhandare, the partner of Chaitnya Typesetting, Thane, Sau. Pratibha More, the operator, have shown initiative in correcting many errors crept unwittingly in the book and deserve special mention for typesetting this volume flawlessly.

I also record my thanks to Shri. Ravindra Prabhu for printing the book neatly.

Thane,
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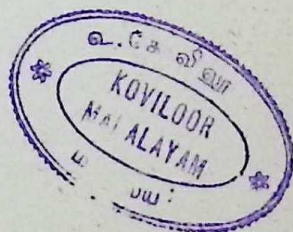
S. D. Kulkarni.



This is a picture of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana found painted in some ancient homes discovered in archaeological excavations in Italy.

Sita is seen carrying in her hand the Tulsi Manjiri (Seed-bearing twig of the sacred Basil plant.)

Courtesy :
World Vedic Heritage
By P.N. Oak
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Indian History.



(From cover page No.2)

Example is better than precept. These two epics give practical lessons to each one of us, in what is Dharma and what is Adharma by presenting in lucid style the life details of these two ideal men – the crest-jewels amongst men.

Their literary value is unparallalled in the annals of the history of world literature. The character delineation is superb. Each one of us feels kinship with those in these epics. On the world-stage they make their debut and disappear. As the Mahabharata puts it – 'यदिहास्ति तत्सर्वत्र, यत्र-इहास्ति न तदकुचित्' – whatever is delineated here, is found every where; whatever is not here, is rarely to be found elsewhere.'

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